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## The tension between political commitment and academic neutrality in the W.E.A.

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Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21954/ou.ro.0000dec5>

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THE TENSION BETWEEN POLITICAL COMMITMENT AND  
ACADEMIC NEUTRALITY IN THE W.E.A.

Submitted by Derek Tatton, M.A.,  
for the degree of Ph.D. in the disciplines  
of the history and the sociology of education.

Author's number: HDC 7330

Date of submission: 22 July 1987

Date of award: 3 March 1988

June, 1987

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The Tension Between Political Commitment  
And Academic Neutrality in the W.E.A.

An Abstract

Throughout the history of the W.E.A. there have been arguments, and sometimes bitter conflicts, about the relationship between educational aims and political objectives.

This thesis examines the tensions and the dilemmas generally experienced in any education involving social and political values, by taking the clash of principles between the W.E.A. (non-party, unsectarian, with its formal emphasis upon objectivity in teaching) and the N.C.L.C. (with its proclaimed Marxist partisanship) as a fundamental challenge for critical re-assessment in the light of contemporary thinking and research.

The study begins with a consideration of six crucial, and even determining, individual experiences and contributions: those of Albert Mansbridge, R.H. Tawney, J.M. Mactavish, J.P.M. Millar, G.D.H. Cole and Raymond Williams.

This is followed by detailed surveys of three particular areas of work - Residential Adult Education, Literature as a W.E.A. Subject, and Community Education from 1960 to 1980 - each of which illustrates how a basic tension between political commitment and academic neutrality permeates all aspects of thinking and practice in the adult education movement.

The final chapter draws together the threads from the survey of particular lives, histories and thematic studies to address theoretical questions about the concepts of liberal education and academic neutrality;- about Marxist and other attitudes towards objectivity and dogmatism; about the nature of the relationship between the Labour movement and the adult education movement.



The tensions are shown to be deep, enduring and seemingly irreconcilable but changes of emphasis and intensity are apparent as the general history and the wider forces and movements in society determine the ideological parameters and the 'paradigm shifts' within which, or against which, the W.E.A. operates.

On the strength of eighty four years' experience, if the W.E.A. celebrates its one hundredth birthday in 2003, it will (and should) do so embodying similar fundamental tensions.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisors:

Ben Cosin for his close interrogation of drafts of this thesis as they slowly emerged, and for some particularly helpful suggestions for further reading.

John Hostler for warm support and wise counsel over some years and especially for his sympathetic help during the crucial period when a crisis in my full-time work could have caused me to abandon the work.

Raymond Williams for an early interest and encouragement.

I am also indebted to the following:

Bill Parkinson for giving me free access to his files on Community Education and the Keele work, and for positively welcoming the recorded interview.

David Goodman for help with information about the Fircroft dispute and also the Keele University Community Education programme.

For kindly agreeing to give recorded interviews I am grateful to;

David Connor, Rosalind Castling and the late Eric Tams. I am also grateful to the following for their interviews which, although not quoted or referred to directly, helped me in thinking through some of the key issues; Ian Bliss, Jill Bliss, Vic Brunt, John Dony, Bill Foulkes, Jim Leech, Peter Vigors, Harry Wells, members of the W.E.A./I.L.O. Summer School, Geneva 1977, members of the W.E.A. Crewe Branch in 1978, Gladys Whitty, Clive Wooffenden.

The following gave me assistance through discussion, correspondence or by loaning or giving me material which I have used; Erica Brook, Tony Dennis, Walter Drews, Roger Fieldhouse, Len Holden, Vernon Hull, the late Arnold Kettle, Allan Kingsbury, Colin Rochester, Cecil Scrimgeour, Michael Standen, Chris Stray Stuart Hall, the late Frank Pickstock and Susan Tatton.

### Abbreviations Used in the Thesis

A.C.G.B.	Arts Council of Great Britain
A.E.U.	Amalgamated Engineering Union
A.P.H.E.W.M.	Association for the Promotion of the Higher Education of Working Men
A.S.T.M.S.	Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs
A.T.A.E.	Association of Tutors in Adult Education
A.U.T.	Association of University Teachers
C.L.C.	Central Labour College
C.D.P.	Community Development Projects
C.N.D.	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
C.O.	Conscientious objector
C.P.	Communist Party (Great Britain)
C.P.S.U.	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
D.E.S.	Department of Education and Science
G.C.E. 'A' level	General Certificate of Education, Advanced level
G.C.E. 'O' level	General Certificate of Education, Ordinary level
E.P.A.	Educational Priority Area
H.M.I.	His/Her Majesty's Inspector
H.M.S.O.	His/Her Majesty's Stationary Office
I.B.A.	Independent Broadcasting Authority
I.F.W.E.A.	International Federation of Workers' Educational Associations
I.L.P.	Independent Labour Party
I.S.T.C.	Iron and Steel Trades Confederation
I.W.C.E.	Independent Working Class Education
L.E.A.	Local Education Authority
N.A.S.U.	National Adult Schools Union
N.C.L.C.	National Council of Labour Colleges
N.C.S.S.	National Council for Social Service

N.L.B.	New Left Books
N.L.R.	New Left Review
N.U.M.	National Union of Mineworkers
N.U.R.	National Union of Railwaymen
O.U.	Open University
P.L.P.	Parliamentary Labour Party
R.S.U.	Ruskin College Students' Union
S.D.F.	Social Democratic Federation
S.D.P.	Social Democratic Party
S.I.T.	Society of Industrial Tutors.
S.L.P.	Socialist Labour Party
S.S.R.C.	Social Science Research Council
S.W.M.F.	South Wales Miners' Federatoion
T.C.C.	Tutorial Classes Committee
T.E.S.	Times Educational Supplement
T.H.E.S.	Times Higher Education Supplement
T.G.W.U.	Transport and General Workers' Union
T.J.	Thomas Jones (founder of Coleg Harlech)
T.U.C.	Trades Union Congress
U.N.E.S.C.O.	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
U.P.W.	Union of Post Office Workers
W.E.A.	Workers' Educational Association
W.E.T.U.C.	Workers' Education Trades Union Committee
Y.M.C.A.	Young Mens' Chritian Association



## CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Acknowledgements	iii.
Abbreviations Used in the Thesis	iv.
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: <u>WORKERS' EDUCATION - A HISTORY THROUGH BIOGRAPHY</u>	8
I.    Albert Mansbridge - Founding and Building the W.E.A.	9
II.   The Importance of Tawney	28
III.  J.M. Mactavish and the W.E.T.U.C.	38
IV.   J.P.M. Millar - the N.C.L.C. and Marxist Adult Education	47
V.    G.D.H. Cole and Workers' Education	67.
VI.   Raymond Williams - Politics and Letters	80
CHAPTER TWO: <u>RESIDENTIAL ADULT EDUCATION</u>	90
I.    Ruskin College	97
II.   The Central Labour College - An Independent Ruskin	109.
III.  Coleg Harlech - Welsh Society and the Dilemmas of Democracy	115
IV.   Fircroft College	131
V.    Wedgwood Memorial College - Oxford and the W.E.A. North Staffs. District	146
VI.   Wansfell College and Burton Manor College - Adult Education in the 1980s	164
CHAPTER THREE: <u>LITERATURE AND THE W.E.A.</u>	177

CHAPTER FOUR:	<u>COMMUNITY EDUCATION</u>	234
CHAPTER FIVE:	<u>POLITICAL COMMITMENT AND ACADEMIC NEUTRALITY - SOME THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS</u>	292
I.	University Standards and Objectivity	294
II.	Marxism and Objectivity	314
III.	Controversy about Bias in the O.U. and in Broadcasting	331
IV.	The 1980s and Towards 2003	344
References and Notes	(an * indicates a Note)	363
Bibliography		416

THE TENSION BETWEEN POLITICAL COMMITMENT  
AND ACADEMIC NEUTRALITY IN THE W.E.A.

INTRODUCTION

The debate is an old one, and there is nothing new about the deep dilemmas and tensions: the history of the working class movement and adult education from the Corresponding Societies, the Chartists, the Co-op Circles, the Mechanics Insititutes through to the W.E.A., the N.C.L.C. and the Adult Residential Colleges is a history of debate about the meaning of education and democracy, social purpose and socialism.

Tension about values has always been there. It has been summarised specifically, in this century,\* as a conflict between those who have seen education as a liberalising process in which the disinterested, scientific and objective search for knowledge and truth should be pursued for its own end - transcending class, ideology and political or religious commitment - and those who have believed that education is, in some way or other, inescapably value-laden and that working class adult education should reflect and promote working class interests and values.

My thesis comprises study of the conflict between the W.E.A. and the N.C.L.C. and the tensions within the W.E.A. which offers a particularly illuminating history of arguments and discussions which are important for education and, indeed, for ideas of democracy, social democracy and socialism.

\* by, for example, Professors Brian Simon, Roy Shaw and Roger Fieldhouse.



The questions raised by these tensions and conflicts are, therefore, very general: Can a teacher be wholly impartial when dealing with controversial issues? Should s/he be? What issues in adult education are not controversial? If absolute objectivity is unattainable is it nonetheless desirable for tutors and students to strive to be as objective as possible? Is not an adult education movement the stronger for being committed to a social purpose? Has the W.E.A.'s concern for liberal values and academic neutrality effectively helped neuter the working class movement in Britain? Were Marxists too doctrinaire and sectarian in the Labour College movement and did their partisanship hinder rather than help the adult education movement? Does the good Marxist teacher, like the good Christian teacher, no more use the class-room for the purposes of conversion than would the Marxist; or Christian, doctor use the surgery for conversion?

These questions can be approached from an abstract point of view, examining the issues through analysis and appraisal of general educational principles and political philosophies as expressed in policy statements, formal constitutional documents and academic papers. The various philosophical, theoretical and abstract analyses and discussions which have engaged with these questions are certainly important (I have valued and used insights gained from this kind of work) but I approach the subject from a different perspective.

This is based on the view that theory and practice may be separated but they can never be divorced, and I start with, and concentrate primarily upon, the personal lived experience of participants - or what are now called activists -- in the history: taking the experiences, views and reflections of individual people on the tensions and controversies they have lived through, acted upon and, sometimes, created.

It quickly becomes clear from a review of Albert Mansbridge's role

in not just founding the W.E.A. but also in determining, in large part, its aims and character that the nature of the Mansbridgean vision and the Mansbridgean W.E.A. has been seen and interpreted differently by historians, commentators and polemicists writing about the W.E.A..

The same complexity in the relationship between the history, the biography, the theory and the practice and the interpretation of both is evident in J.P.M. Millar's work with the N.C.L.C.. I am concerned to examine that complexity which, I should underline at the outset, is there not only in the history but also in myself and ourselves. For, being human, we are simultaneously rational and valuing beings. The dualities at the core of this study are in everybody.

I acknowledge, of course, that although striving to be as objective as possible in what is, I trust, the best tradition of academic neutrality the tension within the rational and valuing human being has operated at every stage of my own work here, including the selection of issues for study and the methodology adopted.

Thus, whilst the choice of persons for study in the first chapter, 'History through Biography', is not arbitrary (Mansbridge, Tawney and Cole must figure in any review of the W.E.A.'s history) clearly other individuals could have been chosen in place of, or in addition to, Mactavish, Millar and Williams. This choice was determined by my own interests and commitments (Raymond Williams' writings form a theoretical commentary throughout) and these carry, and convey, a particular viewpoint and set of values.

My decision to approach the central issues from different directions was likewise consciously determined by my interest in seeking to express and explore the complexities and the ambiguities that are found in individuals but which are found even more so when groups of people work together, or seek to work together, in association or in institutions. And so, my second chapter, on residential adult

education, whilst concentrating upon the W.E.A.'s involvement with the residential colleges, illustrates the way these controversies involve conflicting principles: free speech, political loyalties, teaching and educational standards. The tensions between passionate commitment and critical enquiry have been lived with special intensity in the residential settings of Colleges such as Ruskin, Fircroft and Coleg Harlech.

The fact that I have taught Literature classes in the W.E.A. for a good number of years helped influence, for obvious reasons, my choice of the thematic study of Literature as a subject in W.E.A. classes (Chapter Three). But this choice of direction enables me to follow through some of the questions raised earlier, from a different and illuminating angle. Literature is not, apparently, a main-line 'political' subject and it is interesting and useful - for that reason - to probe its significance (perceived and actual) for the thesis I am advancing.

The Community Education projects and developments in adult education which flourished in the 1960s and the 1970s also throw some new light on the W.E.A.'s historic dilemmas and conflicts. My detailed survey, in Chapter Four, of the main W.E.A. and University projects in Liverpool, Southampton and North Staffordshire focuses upon the new initiatives and approaches which tested established adult education and W.E.A. principles on academic standards and social and political involvement.

My whole approach and methodology - involving close and detailed narrative description of particularities with concurrent commentary and analysis - brings out, implicitly, the complexity and the nuances in this basic tension which permeate, as I demonstrate, all aspects of thinking and practice in the adult education movement. And it shows clearly that though we are concerned with one central tension between



academic neutrality and political commitment there are, in fact, many tensions and conflicts inextricably linked and frequently found in one individual person. Thus, radical political and social theories may threaten or undermine traditional educational practices; bourgeois culture can dominate working class culture; arbitrary divisions have been created between practice in the arts and the appreciation and study of arts 'subjects'; education for 'its own sake' has been valued above and opposed to vocational education; working people have been encouraged to take the broad 'highway' of liberal education rather than climb the educational 'ladder' to a certificated professionalism; tensions have been felt between disciplined long-term study and the education that may be gained by the auto-didact from informal reading, self-directed activity and lived experience.

In my final chapter, I engage directly with the key arguments which thread their way through the narrative: reviewing the theoretical issues which have emerged in the lives and the history, drawing out the ideological implications of the argument. I relate Gramsci's notion of hegemony and E.P. Thompson's libertarian Marxism to the argument the better to re-evaluate the approaches to objectivity and political partisanship. For the same reason, I survey analogous controversies about bias in the Open University itself and in the broadcasting media, noting continuities, cross-currents and contrasts.

A different choice of areas of study and issues of concern could have been made within the terms of my thesis. Major topics such as Trade Union Education, Women's Education, study of 'political' subjects such as Economics or International Affairs, or an International Comparative Study could justify similar attention quite clearly. An alternative historical approach, studying the W.E.A.'s development chronologically, decade by decade, could likewise have been adopted. I would claim, however, that the conclusions I reach about the tensions

being endemic and seemingly irreconcilable, about the dangers of relying upon formal statements of position and the need to constantly test the particular against the general - these would not be qualified fundamentally if those other routes had been taken.

My thesis challenges, implicitly and explicitly, the sharp and polarised confrontation of opposites which the tension between political commitment and academic neutrality frequently creates as an ideologically conditioned reflex and barrier: social purpose versus individual fulfilment; Mansbridgean spiritual vision versus Marxist materialism; education against propaganda; subjective commitment versus scientific objectivity.

I take issue specifically with the influential work of Professor Brian Simon whose tendency to over-simplify and dramatise the ideological opposition between the W.E.A. and the Labour College movement is shown to be representative of those (from left, right and centre) who have interpreted the history of these dualities too much from official pronouncements, policy statements and ideological propagandising. Examination of the actual practice and experience in the localities and across a wider range of leaders and commentators gives a picture which is more complex and which requires more subtle analysis. Thus, the view that the W.E.A. has always operated within bourgeois 'ideological parameters' and that its concern for neutrality has helped neuter the working class movement is also too crude and schematic. Similarly, the older and more influential claim for a 'value-free', 'objective' and 'impartial' teaching in the W.E.A. is based upon a theory which over-simplified the problem behind that difficult word, 'objectivity'.

I conclude by emphasising the W.E.A.'s historic symbiotic relationship with the Labour movement which is itself experiencing radical change and crisis in the 1980s, but one may be re-assured

by the W.E.A.'s adaptability and resilience when facing these inevitable tensions. In seeking a role appropriate to the twenty-first century I suggest that the W.E.A. will need to develop and strengthen its relationship with the new social movements (as defined by Raymond Williams and Fritjof Capra) which, though creating their own demands and controversies, may give re-generative strength to the W.E.A. and 'resources for a journey of hope' as it enters the new millenium.

## CHAPTER ONE

### WORKERS' EDUCATION - A HISTORY THROUGH BIOGRAPHY

'Like all working class movements, the W.E.A. moves in a path worn smooth by the vanguard of the anonymous.'<sup>1</sup>

There are a number of histories of Adult Education which include a history of the W.E.A., and there are several histories of the W.E.A. and histories of W.E.A. Districts. The aim here is not to repeat or summarise the history of the W.E.A. as such, but rather to focus upon particular issues, drawing often from these accounts,<sup>2</sup> by considering the commitments of six people whose work has had a significant and representative influence in the W.E.A..

In this way, we study the tension between political commitment and academic neutrality by tracing the history through these particular people, their lives, views and commitments. This has certain advantages: the tensions are dramatised and, perhaps, seen more clearly when related to the individual lives and perspectives of leading members of a movement. But there are also certain problems and disadvantages: the complexity of the relationship between biography and history, for instance; and any full history would need to take account of the general social and political history of the period, which is only touched on here. (Important changes and continuities nationally, in education and society, are for the most part taken as read).



## I. Albert Mansbridge: Founding and Building the W.E.A..

We begin with Mansbridge: an obvious and necessary starting point for any consideration of the W.E.A.. The story of how this carpenter's son, born in Gloucester in 1876, left school at fourteen to work with a firm of guano merchants and came through the Co-operative Movement, the Church of England, and the University Extension Movement to found the W.E.A. - and on the way, to befriend and gain the respect of the Canon of Westminster, the Master of Balliol and leaders of the Labour and Trade Union Movement - is fascinating and important. It reveals why Mansbridge is one of the major figures in Adult Education.

It also shows graphically that although the W.E.A. is a 20th century movement, it emerged from, and was deeply influenced by, many strands from the 19th century. A rather more detailed outline of Mansbridge's life - what kind of man, his background, inherited Victorian vision and beliefs, the ideological parameters within which he founded the W.E.A. - quickly demonstrates some essential connections between the 19th and 20th centuries.<sup>3</sup>

Both Mansbridge's parents were supporters of the Co-operative Movement. His mother was one of the first members, and she was always an active participant in, the Women's Co-operative Guild. Since the 1840s many Co-operative Societies had decided to devote a small percentage of their profits for educational purposes and in the later decades of the century some of the Societies became directly involved in promoting University Extension Lectures.

Thus, although his schooling (Dame School, Board School, Grammar School) was exceptional in that he gained a scholarship which enabled him to go to Grammar School he always carried with him a firm belief in the sterling virtues of the working class background in which he

had been reared and this, no doubt, because of his parents' positive commitment to the Co-operative Movement and its 'highway' educational philosophy. The Mansbridge family moved from Gloucester to London when Albert was only five years old. He went to school in Battersea whilst his mother's active role in the Co-op. Guilds concentrated upon meetings at St. Jude's in Whitechapel. The Vicar of the parish, Samuel Barnett, was then busily engaged in building up Toynbee Hall as a centre of adult education and social work in the East End.<sup>4</sup> Through his mother, young Albert was, therefore, brought into touch very early with this institution, the first of the University Settlements.

Leaving school when he was just 14 years old, Albert earned his living as a junior office worker in the City for a firm of guano merchants. This involved him leaving home at 7.45am and returning at 7.15pm. It was his habit to walk from Battersea to the office where he worked - a distance of five miles. A busy early working life during which he managed to attend evening classes and acquaint himself with University Extension Lectures. Aided to some extent by these spare time studies Albert left his first City office employment and joined one of the lower grades of the civil service, first as a boy copyist in the Board of the Inland Revenue and then as a clerk in the office of the Committee of the Privy Council on Education - later to become the Board of Education.

As a young man he became the editor of an unofficial civil service magazine, The Union Observer, which he had founded shortly after beginning work in Whitehall. Before he was 21, he had left the civil service and become a clerk at the tea desk of the Co-op. Wholesale Society in Whitechapel. At the age of 25 he was married and he had changed jobs again, to work for the Co-op. Permanent

Building Society.

His actual working experience as a young man was obviously one important element in his making. Another essential element was religion. While he was once on holiday at Gloucester as a young lad he chanced to visit the cathedral during the service of evensong. The impression this made on him was such that he recalled it as the first vision that set him on his path. When working in Whitehall he attended services at Westminster Abbey and was deeply influenced by the rhetoric and the doctrine of the sermons from this prestigious Anglican pulpit. As editor of The Union Observer he invited Canon Gore, after he had heard him preach at the Abbey, to contribute to the magazine. The request was refused, but Gore nevertheless befriended the young and impressionable Mansbridge and invited him to his home.

By the late 1890s Mansbridge was bringing together, and starting to work through a fusing of several key strands of late Victorian idealism: political attitudes and ideas from the Co-operative and Trade Union Movements, an Anglican evangelising and spiritual concept of education, the University Extension Movement's developed version of Liberal Education. After an impressive speech at the Co-operative Congress in 1898 he was invited to address the University Extension Summer Meeting at Oxford in August 1899 and he chose as his subject, "The Education of the Citizen" and advocated a direct alliance between University Extension and the Co-operative Movement. The idea germinated and he returned to the theme publicly in the Spring of 1903 in articles to the University Extension Journal, proposing the formation of a joint committee of the University Extension Movement, the Co-operative Movement and the Trade Union Movement.

The editor of the Journal, who had invited Mansbridge to contribute his articles, was enthusiastic. The idea became a firm



resolve in the Mansbridge household with husband and wife becoming the first two members of the 'Association to Promote the Higher Education of Working Men' (the name Workers' Educational Association was adopted two years later). A provisional committee consisting of three trade unionists, two co-operators and Albert Mansbridge met at Toynbee Hall on July 14th 1903 and a month later the constitution of the new movement was determined at a meeting in Oxford at which Robert Halstead, Secretary of the Co-operative Productive Federation, was the leading speaker. At the end of 1903 the Association had 135 members and eleven affiliated Co-operative Societies.

District Committees were established in North West England and in October 1904, the first branch was founded at Reading (with the assistance of the local branch of the Social Democratic Federation). By the summer of 1905 there were 8 branches and a year later 50 branches has been established.

In 1907 Mansbridge played a key role in the conference held in Oxford, assembled with the specific purpose of considering "What Oxford can do for working people", which led to the publication of the Report in 1908, Oxford and Working Class Education, or the 'Oxford Report'. This conference and report (Mansbridge was the joint secretary of the committee set up to produce the report) recommended and effectively established a network of tutorial classes for working people and each tutorial class was to be of at least two years duration.

With Mansbridge as General Secretary the W.E.A. had become a national movement by 1914, supported by public funding. There were now 9 Districts, 179 branches and 11,430 individual members. In June, just a few months before the start of the War, Mansbridge collapsed severely ill with cerebro-spinal meningitis.

He made a remarkable recovery but this did, however, effectively end his full-time W.E.A. work.

Mansbridge and the founding principles of the W.E.A.

H.P. Smith's statement that the W.E.A., "in its primal stage was Mansbridge"<sup>5</sup> is hardly exaggeration because it is quite clear that Mansbridge's energy and vision from the turn of the century through to the first decade of the W.E.A.'s existence were decisive not just in founding the Association but also in determining, in large part, its aims and character.

However, the nature of the Mansbridgean vision and the Mansbridgean W.E.A. has been seen and interpreted differently by historians, commentators and polemicists writing about the W.E.A..

The issue is complex and difficult to get completely in focus precisely because the tensions we are concerned with tend to colour and blur the vision.

This can be illustrated - in a way which also signposts some key themes to be explored later - by engaging with one particular historical analysis: Brian Simon's Education and the Labour Movement 1870 - 1920.<sup>6</sup>

Professor Simon's history has been very influential not just because of the evident scholarship and authority Simon brings to his account but also because, as a Marxist, he offers a left-wing view which others on the Left have followed. Roger Fieldhouse's short history, The W.E.A. - Aims and Achievements 1903-1977, has a similar perspective, for example.<sup>7</sup>

Professor Simon establishes the outlook and character of the W.E.A. by quoting Mansbridge at key points. In the chapter, Developments and Conflicts in Adult Education, 1900-1920, he describes the development from University Extension work to the W.E.A. where



the University men, 'All shared a liberal humanist outlook: education was good for its own sake... education would spiritualise their lives.'<sup>8</sup>

He goes on to quote Mansbridge's, The Kingdom of the Mind:

"The appeal of the hour to trade unionists and co-operators is that they make political strokes, promote bills, register protests, and send deputations to responsible ministers," wrote Albert Mansbridge in 1903. "The true appeal is that they lift themselves up through higher knowledge to higher works and higher pleasures, which if responded to, will inevitably bring about right and sound action upon municipal, national, and imperial affairs; action brought about with conscious effort - the only effectual action." This, in essence, was the outlook of the new organisation that came into being at this time, the Workers' Educational Association.

And he begins the next paragraph:

The outlook described seems at first sight entirely opposed to the socialist approach described earlier...<sup>10</sup>

Simon is contrasting, in the familiar way, the W.E.A. and the Labour College Movement and whilst it is unfair to state that his books are 'hostile to the W.E.A.',<sup>11</sup> there is no doubt that he is more critical of the W.E.A. than he is of the Labour Colleges and he uses some crucial quotes from Mansbridge to underpin his ideological stance.

Mansbridge, he writes, held the view that higher education for the working class should be concerned fundamentally with their spiritual development and not with immediate political or practical issues, that its function, in fact, was precisely to raise the workers from material considerations; these would right themselves in the end...

Then, he quotes Mansbridge again directly,

"... deep draughts of knowledge will divert the strong movements of the people from the narrow paths of immediate interests to the broad

way of that rightly ordered social life of which only glimpses have yet been seen even by the greatest of the world's seers."<sup>13</sup>

Through these quotations and comments, Simon is able to hold to a fairly straight, and even sharp, contrast between the W.E.A. and the Socialist/Marxist groups which had inherited the earlier Socialist League slogan: educate, agitate, organise.

Asa Briggs, reviewing Professor Simon's book, said that this was, "obviously not an easy chapter to write, for we still lack many of the basic sources - for instance, a definitive life of Mansbridge." However, he went on to make these critical observations:

"It is not an adequate summary of the difference between the N.C.L.C. and the W.E.A. to say that, 'one group saw education as the means towards transforming society, the other wished to direct it to transforming the individual': such a sharp confrontation of opposites ignores the intricate and often subtle interconnections of individual and society. I would also like to have seen a far more critical survey in Mr. Simon's book of terms like society and more particularly class. Is it really true to say with the N.C.L.C. that, 'the W.E.A., however devoted and self-sacrificing its leaders, seemed to be providing a diversion, to be weakening rather than advancing the working-class cause'? Should not statements of this kind be subjected to close historical analysis?"<sup>14</sup>

The same rhetorical question could be asked also of the section of this chapter on Ruskin College and the Oxford Report, when he introduces the section with the observation, "Nevertheless, there was one institution at Oxford in which these two conceptions of education came dramatically into conflict."<sup>15</sup> Here too his sympathies are, as Geoff Brown has noted,<sup>16</sup> rather uncritically with the Labour College Movement.

Simon deals at length with the, "somewhat"<sup>17</sup> radical proposals of the 'Oxford Report' but his selection of references and his commentary seek to deny its radical nature particularly at the point



where the Report states that, "the management and organisation of the class should be mainly in the hands of work people."<sup>18</sup>

I want to suggest then:

- i) that Professor Simon selected his Mansbridge quotes and references in such a way as to over-simplify and dramatise the ideological opposition between the W.E.A. and the Labour College Movement; and
- ii) that the aims and experiences of movements such as the W.E.A. and the Labour Colleges cannot easily be defined with reference to official pronouncements without distorting the picture of the real practices and experiences in the localities.

It is true, of course, that Mansbridge believed in a "spiritual, non-materialist"<sup>19</sup> education of the working class. He said that his University was Westminster Abbey, where he "heard with passionate delight the great preachers of the 1890s."<sup>20</sup> But from acknowledgement and recognition of this it seems that the easy assumption can follow that he had no real concern for the material and the social: that there is a complete divorce between the spiritual and the material/social/political.

To imply that there was such a divorce in Mansbridge's case is surely to over-simplify: after all, if one just looks at what his energies went into and produced one must respect his achievement within the broad (very material) educational sphere. In addition to founding the W.E.A., he was chief architect to the Tutorial Class Movement which developed some five years later. In 1913 he transplanted the W.E.A. and the Tutorial Class Movement to Australia. He established the Church Tutorial Classes Association; the World Association for Adult Education; and he co-operated with Lord Haldane in setting up the British Institute (now the National Institute) of Adult Education.

As we read Mansbridge, or accounts of his work and life, we can hardly fail to be aware that he was a man of deep and sometimes contradictory beliefs and attitudes (a not uncommon phenomenon); part of him was radical, Christian Socialist, a stubborn, genuine democrat; he was part evangelist, the prophet and preacher with, perhaps, a strong touch of the enthusiast's naivety ( a friend described him as an "inspired child");<sup>21</sup> part, conservative, the yearner for consensus, the fixer, the Establishment socialiser, "with the gift of tongues."<sup>22</sup>

This latter became predominant in the later years. As Professor Jennings says:

Mansbridge the sage, post-1918, was in important respects a different man from Mansbridge the man of action, 1903-1914... As a sage he had little to give, apart from the communication of his mystical conception of the educated soul, and his ability to inspire all sorts and conditions of men. He was not an original thinker.<sup>23</sup>

Or, in Tawney's words, after Mansbridge's illness he, "never fully recovered the power and sense of strategy which had made him so brilliant a pioneer of adult education."<sup>24</sup> In short, there are several different Mansbridges and each one can illustrate a facet of his major creation - the W.E.A..

If I stress now the more radical this is not to deny that there is some truth in Brian Simon's view, but my aim is to show that it is a partial view.

#### Mansbridge, Equality and Democracy

Mansbridge told a conference in 1908 that, "education would never be put right in England unless all classes accepted as a common solution one system of schools unified upon a great highway in which there were no class distinctions whatever."<sup>25</sup> He called for



secondary education for all, with maintenance allowance where needed; access to the Universities for all who could benefit; a national system of creches; and the abolition of the half-time system. He also advocated paid holidays for all workers.

Spiritual, non-materialist? Maybe, but Mary Stocks offers this generous judgement, after tracing his spiritual quest for education:

But at no point does he appear to have drawn the conclusion that sedulous cultivation of these liberating influences might lead to his emergence from the proletarian rut into some stratosphere of individual social eminence. His interest lay in the elimination of the rut. What he found good others must have. The windows through which he viewed the great expanse of human experience must be open to all. If people preferred them shut, that was because they did not know what kind of a landscape they opened up. They must be shown. He was, indeed, and remained through his life, a very religious man, and it was part of his religion to bring to others that more abundant life which he himself found good.<sup>26</sup>

His ideas on education were radical and they were obviously in tune with socialist and Labour Movement ideals. "The field of education is a common upon which all men can meet and exercise rights", he wrote in An Adventure in Working Class Education<sup>27</sup> and in the same book he explains how the attitude of the Association became symbolised in the title, The Highway: "the old ideas of the ladder of education being too restrictive and ineffective...".<sup>28</sup>

The sketch of Mansbridge's biography we began with makes abundantly clear the importance of the Co-operative Movement tradition in which he was rooted. H.P. Smith underlines this in his Labour and Learning reminding us that Mansbridge,

was a student in the Co-operative Movement, served in it most of

his working life, was a lecturer on its panel, and what is more, conducted much of his early propaganda for the W.E.A. at educational gatherings sponsored by Co-operative organisations. As compared with an ordinary trade union, there is no occupational exclusiveness about co-operation; it starts from a broad basis of support among ordinary working people and takes in all comers.

Perhaps because of this background and relationship with the Co-operative Movement, Mansbridge and the infant W.E.A. were, in some areas, in advance of sections of Labour Movement opinion. In 1905, the original title of the Association was changed to W.E.A. from the 'Association for the Promotion of the Higher Education of Working Men'.

A.P.H.E.W.M. was thought too cumbersome, but also patronising and needlessly offensive to the Co-operative Women's Guild. At the first branch meeting of the A.P.H.E.W.M., Mansbridge had noted, sympathetically, that, "working women objected to the exclusive term, 'working men'".<sup>29</sup> In 1907, the W.E.A. formed a Women's Advisory Committee and in 1910 appointed a National Women's Education Organiser.

Mansbridge was not, however, a political thinker and there were ambiguities in his attitudes. As Professor Jennings wryly notes, he managed to say, at the same time, "education is necessary for emancipation" and "education is emancipation".<sup>30</sup> His emphasis on the value of education for its own sake had, in fact, reached the point by 1924 where he seemed to be rejecting education for social purpose altogether:

The old original faith of the W.E.A. that man is destined, if he would live aright, to develop his mind and body in the power of the spirit, not because it will serve some specific purpose but because it is the law of his being, still stands to me as the reason for education in our time.<sup>31</sup>

I have said that Mansbridge was a strong believer in grass-roots



democracy and this is crucial. His gospel was: "Discover your own needs, organise in your own way, study as you wish to study."<sup>32</sup> And he wrote, "The vital principle on which the movement depends is the full and free expression of the minds of working men and women based upon their own experience."<sup>33</sup>

This was a truly radical philosophy (it still is) and any evaluation of the history of the W.E.A. should take full measure of its implications. Namely, that the local members - the branches and districts - have control and that the aims and purposes of the Association are, therefore, likely to vary according both to local circumstances and overall changes in public and Labour Movement opinion. In short, if the Labour Movement is strong and its views and policies have wide support among the people then there is no reason why these should not find expression through the W.E.A.'s voluntary democratic structure.

It is Brian Simon's failure to acknowledge the relevance and importance of the fundamental democratic organisation of the W.E.A. which leads him to distort the history most grossly. He writes, summarising the position:

By the winter of 1909 then, the two major trends in working class education had assumed both organisational and institutional form. On the one hand, the W.E.A. now in its sixth year, had developed a new type of relationship with the University and, as a result, was now assured of official support from the Board of Education and local authorities. On the other hand, the Central Labour College had now come into existence supported by the Plebs League with its journal and local organisation. The differences between the two organisations, in terms of the purpose of working-class education, the content of teaching, organisation and finance were fundamental. Almost a century earlier a classic struggle at the London Mechanics'

Institute had been fought on similar issues, to lead in turn to a proliferation of working class educational activities which kept themselves independent of patronage and ultimate control by representatives of the middle and upper classes. The Labour College and the Plebs League were carrying on this tradition at a time when the working class was more homogeneous and more highly organised than it had been at this earlier phase.<sup>34</sup>

The implication here, obviously, is that the W.E.A.'s democracy is not real and substantial: that it, the W.E.A., is subject to patronage and ultimate control by representatives of the middle and upper classes. One can show, constitutionally, that this need not, necessarily, be the case but to challenge the judgement historically it is essential to look closely at the detailed history of the Association and the Movement: what really went on in Bedford and Barrow - in Sheffield and Sidcup - in the Rossendale Valley and the East Riding of Yorkshire?

Over the last decade, in addition to the general histories of the W.E.A. written by Jennings and Fieldhouse, there have appeared a number of W.E.A. district and branch histories and these help provide more local evidence. Most relevant too, in this respect, is the chapter written by Geoff Brown in the book, Adult Education for a Change,<sup>35</sup> because in this chapter -which is called 'Independence and Incorporation' - he engages directly with this issue.

His starting point is the revival of interest in working class adult education in the 1970s, not least in the W.E.A. itself, and he rightly says that a new generation has looked back at the history of the W.E.A. and the Labour College Movement to see what may be learned:

The history of the W.E.A. and the N.C.L.C. particularly up to the Second World War, and the debate between the two organisations offer some guidance, both positive and negative. It is the primary purpose of this paper to explore this history with a view to providing this.



Such an exercise is long overdue, since in some quarters the Labour College Movement has been virtually ignored or at best belittled. In other quarters, the Labour College Movement has been praised uncritically and the W.E.A. attacked unfairly.<sup>36</sup>

He goes on to say that the reality of the W.E.A. and the reality of the Labour College Movement have been obscured and that the closeness between the two on some important points has been underplayed.

The Guild Communist and Labour College supporter, William Mellor, acknowledged the point about the W.E.A.'s grass-roots democracy, in 1920:

Fortunately for the W.E.A. its constitution leaves to the students a great amount of liberty... It is, indeed, in just those places where the official view has least hold that the W.E.A. succeeds in securing the support of the working classes, and thereby in becoming an efficient instrument of working class education. Places like the West Riding of Yorkshire, for instance, have managed to evade most of the regulations designed to keep the W.E.A. in the straight path, and the workers do control their own education.<sup>37</sup>

Although the W.E.A. in Yorkshire was outstanding in this respect, the position was, in fact, similar in most districts in the first three decades at least, and such was bound to be the case because the constitution allowed it.

Another example from the same period is the invitation the Workington Branch extended to Willie Gallacher, from Red Clydeside, to give two lectures to the W.E.A., after which he went on to a strike-meeting of Co-op. shop assistants.<sup>38</sup>

There is the interesting case of the Secretary of the Northern District, J.G. Trevena, who was imprisoned during the First World War as a conscientious objector. Whilst he was in prison his wife carried on the work as District Secretary. A motion was framed by the District



Treasurer to be put before the District Council in December 1918, stating that the, "District is of the opinion that J.G. Trevena having, as a C.O. refused to perform work of national importance as an alternative to military service, is unfitted to act as District Secretary." The motion was, however, first considered by the District Executive Committee and it was rejected by seven votes to four. It was also considered by the W.E.A.'s Central Executive on the 22nd November, and rejected unanimously as contrary to the non-party political character of the Association.<sup>39</sup>

There were, of course, attempts to control the W.E.A. from above:

In 1923, for instance, E. Gitsham, a W.E.A. organising tutor in the East Riding of Yorkshire was accused of making indiscreet remarks and advocating 'socialism'. A County Council member, Colonel Saltmarsh, said that Gitsham had suggested that a time would come "when all workers would be paid alike". The County Council, disliking this sentiment, threatened to withdraw its £75 per year grant to the W.E.A. if Gitsham was not dismissed. The W.E.A. rejected this advice out of hand, saying that it would raise the £75 from its own supporters with the result that the County Council eventually backed down.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, in this example, the potential for tutor, class and district to be 'independent' is demonstrated so that whatever the nature of W.E.A. 'Head-Office' (or Founders') statements on policy and aims, any real assessment of the work must also take full account of what was actually practised at the level of the branches and the classes.

Many W.E.A. branch officers and active members held progressive views and were well to the left, politically. It is known, for example, that the Chairman of the East Midland District from 1925 - 1940, a miner, had been, "excluded from pits for outspokenness against injustices done to some of his fellow workers."<sup>41</sup>

Many Labour Councillors on County Councils up and down the country had been W.E.A. officers and students during the 1920s and the 1930s, and it is, as Geoff Brown says, "a gross over-simplification to see N.C.L.C. people as militant and W.E.A. people as moderates."<sup>42</sup>

At the local level there is much evidence of a closeness and interplay between the W.E.A. and the Labour Colleges. The Education Commission of the I.L.P. (Bradford) recommended in the 1930s that:

The ideal education for a worker is first a Labour College course, and then as a corrective a W.E.A. tutorial course, say in economics, to instil a shade of modest doubt, to suggest alternatives and generally to mellow the whole attitude.<sup>43</sup>

Such a transition is documented as having taken place in many areas.

John Dover Wilson, best known today as a Shakespearean scholar, was H.M.I. for Adult Classes in Yorkshire in the early 1920s and he recalls in his autobiography that:

It was not uncommon to find a member of the Labour College, a Marxist rival of the W.E.A., in one of their classes. And I was always pleased when it happened, since he with his rather crude Marxism was apt to call the class back to fundamentals. He acted like garlic in the salad.<sup>44</sup>

This raises the important question of the role of discussion in W.E.A. classes. Here again, Mansbridge's formative influence in the early years was of paramount importance and any study in the history of adult education which ignores or plays down this question is bound not to do full justice to either Mansbridge himself or to the W.E.A..

It was Mansbridge's concern to change the practice from University Extension Lectures to 'intensive class teaching' which led him to promise the Rochdale Education Guild in 1907 that if they could find thirty students willing to study for two years he would try to arrange a tutorial class. Thus, in January 1908 the Tutorial Class



Movement was born in Rochdale and Longton with Tawney as tutor in both towns. Mansbridge's favourite dictum was, 'The Lecture is one, discussion is one thousand'.<sup>45</sup> When he addressed the Congress of the Universities of the British Empire on the subject of University Tutorial Classes in 1912, he said, "The students control the class... It is the class of the students - each student is a teacher, and each teacher is a student."<sup>46</sup> Democracy within the W.E.A. class itself... And normally the discussion periods which followed exposition from the tutors were combative occasions. In the report of the first major inspection of tutorial classes by Professor Hobhouse and H.M.I. Headlam they noted that in the discussions views were exchanged between tutors and students, "with great frankness and simplicity", and that controversial subjects were, "frequently raised by one member or another of the class, and sometimes pursued with considerable vigour and plainness of expression."<sup>47</sup>

Even if we assume (against the evidence) that all W.E.A. tutors were consciously or unconsciously engaged in an exercise of 'social control' or 'brain-washing', getting members to accept the status quo then the vigour and the range of discussion in the classes should disabuse people of the notion that this was, in fact, what happened.

Anyone with experience of a lively adult class knows that through discussion a class may take a direction the tutor had not intended and the members of the class may learn and interpret in ways he had not planned or expected. An ironmoulder, who was a member of a Salford Tutorial Class between 1911 and 1914 has written that the tutor had to put up with, "storms and reproaches" and, "long-winded criticisms". He and his fellow students took their knowledge, sifted it through their own political stances and went out to spread this knowledge to the work-shops, the homes, the street corner meetings. One of their tutors is recorded as having interspersed his remarks



with such statements as, "Now, don't let me hear any of you speaking at the street corner in Manchester say this or that, unless you fully understand this or that."<sup>48</sup>

In fact, there is evidence which suggests that discussion periods were so potent that tutors could be converted to views they had not previously held. John Thomas, first Secretary to the W.E.A. in Wales suggested that,

...because of its very Socratic method of teaching, with question and answer, between students and teacher, particularly in the second hour...(the W.E.A. class was) a disseminating ground for Marxian teachings to be discussed, if not actually spread.

The tutor may not be a Marxist, but the students in the class were apparently unable to,

resist the opportunity to discuss very ably, certain Marxian doctrines...

In fact, so effective has been the criticisms in some of these classes in Economics and some social subjects that the tutor himself has been forced to hold a Marxian outlook, as opposed to a Marshallian outlook.<sup>49</sup>

This has, no doubt, happened in all ways and with almost every kind of political, philosophic, religious and aesthetic view.

Mansbridge criticised tutors who denied their students access to the full range of opinion. "No class can afford to disregard Marshall or Marx."<sup>50</sup> Mansbridge's conception of education certainly conformed with the liberal academic definition of objectivity. We will be alerted later to the weaknesses and the dangers when appeal to academic impartiality becomes an all-pervading absolute. Sure enough, the balancing of all arguments can lead to a sterile neutrality. Yet, this emphasis upon open access to all views and aspects of the subject (the liberal approach) remains vital, and must remain preferable to any closed, sectarian and dogmatic pedagogy.

It is interesting to see that Roger Fieldhouse ends his historical survey (despite his earlier critique of 'Mansbridgean values'), with a powerful statement in support of liberal adult education:

Actions and commitment are preferable to a mesmerised indifference stemming from an over-sterile objectivity, but such action or commitment must derive from a wide-ranging analytical study and a deep understanding of all aspects of the subject. The W.E.A. has long

been justly proud of this liberal academic approach to adult education.<sup>51</sup>

It is even more significant, in concluding this engagement with a Marxist view of Mansbridge, to note that, in other contexts, Brian Simon's own contemporary Marxist commitment endorses an educational and pluralist political view which is, at least, not inconsistent with the W.E.A. expression of social purpose and liberal education. In the Introduction to the book The Radical Tradition in Education in Britain which Simon compiled and edited in 1972, he quotes approvingly William Lovett's Chartism (1840):

In particular, Lovett sees the task of the teacher (as I have expressed it elsewhere) "not as that of imposing knowledge and habits on the children, but of assisting them to acquire knowledge and habits through their own activity, so exercising their reason and moral judgement that they come to understand for themselves and know aright". Such an approach stands in the sharpest contrast to that of men who saw education as a means of moulding society to serve the interest of a particular class or sect...<sup>52</sup>

And as a member of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party in the 1960s, Simon replied to a discussion series in the journal Marxism Today affirming a policy of political pluralism, with freedom of expression in the arts and sciences (this policy had been criticised by contributors to the Marxism Today discussion as a policy of 'ideological neutrality') and he argued that these commitments represented an "important step in the move away from dogmatism."

## CHAPTER ONE

### II. The Importance of Tawney

'By far the greatest force in Adult Education in the 20th Century'<sup>53</sup>

Hugh Gaitskell, at the Memorial Service for Tawney, 1962

Tawney devoted himself to the W.E.A. from its early years. First tutor of the University Tutorial Classes, he was the "real initiator of the teaching experiment"<sup>54</sup> which gave impetus to the Tutorial Class Movement; he was involved in the production of the 1908 'Oxford Report' which constitutes a landmark in the history of adult education; his essay, An Experiment in Democratic Education, is a W.E.A. locus classicus; and Tawney "took on a considerable amount of writing for 'The 1919 Report'"<sup>55</sup> which, "has been for over half a century the most frequently cited document in the literature of adult education in English."<sup>56</sup>

In addition to being a major teacher, thinker and writer for the W.E.A., he was also actively involved working at all levels in committees. He was a member of the W.E.A. Executive Committee from 1905 to 1949; a Vice-President of the Association from 1920, and the President from 1928 to 1943. As his biographer says, the 1930s was Tawney's decade in education. During these years, "he ripened into something between the paterfamilias of the W.E.A. and the Patron Saint of Adult Education. He was the unchallenged leader of the W.E.A. - head of its deputations, writer of its policy statements, as well as its public figurehead."<sup>57</sup>

At the various meetings and conferences I have attended since his death, through the 1960s to the 1980s, Tawney has been the most frequently quoted adult education 'thinker'. In the 1980s, Tawney's influence in the wider arena of contemporary British politics has remained very important. The new British Social Democratic Party claimed him as



a progenitor and named the Party's version of the Fabian Society after him. At the same time, Michael Foot and Tony Benn were quoting Tawney to support their respective positions within the Labour Party. In a major article, My Kind of Socialism, Michael Foot referred to Tawney as, "the most eminent and respected theoretician of the Labour Party - almost the last of the species..."<sup>58</sup>

The historian, Raphael Samuel, in his scholarly analysis of the S.D.P.'s claim to be the heirs of Tawney challenged that Party's "talismanic use of Tawney's name", and in a very interesting passage (which is of central importance to our theme) he wrote about Tawney's Christianity, stating that,

his Christianity gave him a sense of the totality of social relations - including their psychic roots - which a Marxist might well envy: and it saved him from triumphalism."<sup>59</sup>

This is crucial when we come back to Brian Simon's characterisation of the W.E.A.. What he calls, 'that fundamental divergence of purpose' between the W.E.A. and the N.C.L.C.<sup>60</sup> But any account of the history of the W.E.A., adult education and the Labour movement must take full measure of Tawney. It is then significant that, despite Tawney's stature in the W.E.A., Professor Simon chooses as his main quotation to help illustrate the fundamental difference between the Labour Colleges and the W.E.A. what he calls "a characteristic passage". In this, Tawney certainly uses Mansbridgean phrases like, "desire for knowledge for its own sake... belief in the free exercise of reason without regard to material results and because reason is divine... knowledge can never be a means but only an end."<sup>61</sup>

#### Education for social purpose

What was the 'characteristic' Tawney view on adult education? A commitment to social purpose in education was basic to Tawney and his sense of the totality of social relations gave a deep intellectual

strength to this conviction. He acknowledged frequently, throughout his life, the need to see education within a historical, class and political context. It is important to quote Tawney directly to demonstrate how Simon's 'fundamental divergence' argument undervalues this strong emphasis in Tawney.

He actually opens his article, An Experiment in Democratic Education (from which Simon quotes) with this paragraph:

It is surely a very barren kind of pedantry which would treat education as though it were a closed compartment within which principles are developed and experiments tried undisturbed by the changing social currents of the world around. The truth is that educational problems cannot be considered in isolation from the aspirations of the great bodies of men and women for whose sake alone it is that educational problems are worth considering at all.<sup>62</sup>

And this, from the same section of the article, is arguably characteristic too:

"What", said an educated man to the writer, "you teach history and economics to miners and engineers? Take care. You will make them discontented and disloyal to us." That division of mankind into those who are ends and those who are means, whether made by slaveholders or by capitalists, is the ultimate and unforgivable wrong, with which there can be no truce neither in education nor in any other department of social life. To such wickedness only one answer is possible, Ecrasez l'infame.<sup>63</sup>

Reviewing the first ten years of the W.E.A.'s work he claimed:

The strength of the movement is that by casting a wide net it is able to draw together all the educational forces of a district, to give the demand for higher education the support of a representative and democratic organisation, and to build from

within instead of borrowing from without. To build from within, to help men to develop their own genius, their own education, their own culture, that is the secret.<sup>64\*</sup>

This is very close to the N.C.L.C. position on independent workers education - "their own education, their own culture" - though Tawney distanced himself from sectarianism and a dogmatic pedagogy. There was, even so, a clear connection between his developed conception of socialism and his educational vision. He argued, "education ought to be a vehicle of that social solidarity which socialism partly requires, partly creates."<sup>65</sup>

There is obviously, here, a quite radical difference between Tawney and Mansbridge. They often disagreed sharply on both educational and political issues. When a book on adult education was being planned in early 1909, he made his disagreement with Mansbridge's proposed outline of a series of essays abundantly and almost brutally clear:

These authors will produce merely pious platitudes about how nice it is for people to be educated. In fact, a collection of essays of this kind would be mere gossip which is not only useless but debauches the mind.<sup>66</sup>

Ross Terrill gives another example of difference in his biography of Tawney:

Mansbridge was terrified that the unions might take over the W.E.A.. In this situation, Tawney was a splendidly effective bridge... he leaned to the political rather than the cultural view of the W.E.A.'s task.<sup>67</sup>

And when there was a difference with Mansbridge over whether Acland - a distinguished and well-known Liberal - should join the Executive Committee of the W.E.A., Tawney wrote to Mansbridge opposing Acland's election on the grounds that,



"his inclusion (without the inclusion of an equally well-known Labour man) would, in fact, give us the appearance of a Liberal bias", and he wrote, in the same letter, "as a socialist, which you are not, I hear a great many comments on the W.E.A. which you do not hear."<sup>68</sup>

The implication here is clear enough. Tawney believed that he was more in touch with the radical Labour movement than was Mansbridge, even in the early year of 1909.

I suggest, therefore, that Brian Simon over-simplifies the 'two conceptions of education' - W.E.A. and N.C.L.C. - by elevating Mansbridge and down-playing Tawney. More than that, I think it is arguable that other historians of the W.E.A. have tended to do the same (though not so dramatically, and for different reasons). Professor Jennings' Short History of the W.E.A., 1903 - 1978 consists of three chapters. The first, which takes the history through to the end of the First World War is entitled The Mansbridge Years, and it carries that emphasis. Mary Stocks and H.P. Smith write a similar kind of narrative history which gives primary attention to the foundation (and the founder) of the movement and then chronicles the developments from that same perspective - Albert Mansbridge, Oxford and the W.E.A. is the sub-title of H.P. Smith's book, published in 1956. Roger Fieldhouse quotes Mansbridge most frequently in the section of his book where he very usefully summarises the Founding Principles of the W.E.A.: "The Mansbridgean W.E.A.", he writes, "was welcomed with open arms by the Oxford social reformers who harboured a sense of guilt about the social exclusiveness of the universities."<sup>69</sup>

It is not a question of denying Mansbridge's crucial role in founding the W.E.A., or his importance in the first decade, and later. It is more a matter of questioning the emphasis on the 'Mansbridgean W.E.A.' which can too easily extend to a generalised assumption that

Mansbridge's views were an expression of a W.E.A. consensus.<sup>70\*</sup>

Tawney expressed not only a more eloquent and consistent view on the W.E.A.'s educational and social purpose but he, I do suggest, more broadly represented the trade union and radical-socialist left of the W.E.A. than did Mansbridge. Fieldhouse writes:

There were those within the W.E.A. as well as outside who were unhappy about Mansbridge's view that education is emancipation and were not altogether sorry about his resignation in 1915. He was replaced as General Secretary by J.M. Mactavish who attached greater importance than Mansbridge to forging close relations with the trade unions.<sup>71</sup>

And Tawney was one of those who favoured the change.

It is true that it was later, during his presidential years, when Tawney's influence was at its peak. His presidential addresses were meticulously prepared models of eloquence and "they were the great annual occasions of the Association".<sup>72</sup> They gave inspiration to a whole generation of W.E.A. members: during my ten years working for the W.E.A. in the Eastern District I remember Frank Jacques (Secretary of the District since 1935!) referring to these addresses on a number of occasions, treating Tawney's principles as the touch-stone for W.E.A. practices in the 1970s.

#### Tawney's Presidential Themes

His Presidential addresses to Conference are still a pleasure to read and, taking them together, the characteristic Tawney themes emerge.

i) Education as a dynamic of social change, taking Britain towards equality. He argued for the acceptance of equality as the only tolerable basis of educational policy. He made it clear that he was not just concerned with equal opportunity in education, allowing a few

to climb the educational ladder:

Influential sections of opinion are willing, within limits, to provide opportunities for gifted individuals to rise. What they cannot bear is the thought of educational changes which, by raising the whole level, will alter the relations between classes.<sup>73</sup>

He was concerned with public education in general, calling for support for W.E.A. campaigns against the 'intolerable conditions' in schools and to remedy the 'capricious and disastrous inequalities' in education generally.<sup>74</sup>

ii) Democracy. "The truth is you cannot have democracy without convictions"<sup>75</sup> but for these convictions to hold they must go through a process which is one of education. And so the importance of social and political education is a key-note in his speeches:

While I welcome the widened range of intellectual interests reflected in the greater variety of subjects studies in our classes, I hope that the time will never come when the sciences concerned with the life of man in society are relegated to a second place. But in this field at any rate, faith without works, study without practice, is profitless.<sup>76</sup>

That means,

We must not avoid controversial subjects - controversy is the very breath of education - we must show that such subjects become more exciting, not less, when heat is converted into light.<sup>77</sup>

iii) Workers Education. For most of the 1930s, demand was outrunning supply for adult education. He warned of the dangers that could result from complacency faced with this situation. "Nothing fails like success",<sup>78</sup> he said, and he favoured refusing to establish classes except for groups comprised predominantly of working class members, "in an atmosphere they themselves create."<sup>79</sup> By 1944 he was responding to criticism, from within, of the title of the W.E.A.:



I am informed from time to time by well-meaning sympathisers that our title is a rock of offence to potential members. My feeling, as I listen to them, is one in which pity for nerves which are so easily shaken is mingled with satisfaction at the knowledge that we are equipped with a formula which relieves us of the painful necessity of excluding the victims of these apprehensions by automatically causing them to exclude themselves.<sup>80</sup>

Another danger he returned to frequently was that of the dilution of the quality of teaching and 'following the line of least resistance', as far as standards and demands are concerned.

iv) Education and Propaganda. Tawney rarely referred to the W.E.A.'s rival, the N.C.L.C., and never in his Presidential addresses, (not by name, at least). He had, however, in the early 1920s spoken to a W.E.A. gathering in Manchester about the politics of citizenship when he warned against taking refuge in the illusory consolations of dogmatic ideologies... "But if we reject these primrose paths to futility... only one alternative remains" - the democratic, co-operative, collective - "since none of us can hope to travel far towards truth alone."<sup>81</sup>

He returned to this theme in his 1944 Address. He said then that there is much muddle-headed thinking about education and propaganda and he illustrated what he believed to be the simple truth of the matter:

It is one thing... to teach a man how to handle tools; it is another to determine the purpose for which they shall be used.

The business of an educational body is the first, not the second.

Its function is not to impose on its students a pre-determined body of dogmatic conclusions. It is to assist them to reach their own.<sup>82</sup>

Then in a very interesting and revealing passage he summarised in an image, his whole attitude to education and politics:

When in the distant days before the deluge, I used to reflect on the reaction of British Democracy to the crises which confronted it - 1919, 1925-26, 1929-31, and then the rapids - my conclusions about it, such as they were, were cast in the form, not, I'm afraid, of the logical deductions of the truly philosophic thinker, but of a picture. Its attitude appeared to me to resemble that of a crowd standing in front of a door which, after a century of battering, had at last been thrown open - a crowd which protested that the house belonged to them, but the majority of whom were too diffident to cross the threshold, while a vociferous minority insisted that the use of doors to enter houses was a right wing deviation betraying a bourgeois ideology, and that the only procedure worthy of emancipated spirits illumined by the light of science was to scramble up the walls, remove the roof and descend by a rope ladder suspended in the void. Torpor is not wisdom, though it often masquerades as such; nor is barking, biting, though it frequently pretends to be. I have never been able to see why, in order to be prudent, one should bleat like a sheep, or, in order to be courageous, one should rave like a lunatic. What the world needs - what democratic movements need above all others - is neither good sense alone nor force and energy alone, but energy, force and good sense combined. The honesty which is determined to see facts as they are, and the resolution which alone can make them other than they are, are not least among the qualities which education should foster.<sup>83</sup>

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The Labour College movement had, of course, denounced Mansbridge but Tawney was a more difficult target. Some of his books had unfavourable and slighting reviews in Plebs - "He is so confoundedly

dull. I cannot picture him as dangerous"<sup>84</sup> - but he was often treated with cautious or grudging respect.

His commitment to the Labour and Trade Union movement was closer to G.D.H. Cole's than to Mansbridge's. Like Cole,

Tawney was present at the birth of the W.E.T.U.C.... he played a part in providing suitable conditions for its growth and in the attempts to gain as foster-parent for it, the T.U.C....<sup>85</sup>

and in 1926 he became Vice-President of the W.E.T.U.C.. When he succeeded Pugh as President in 1928, "he gave it every encouragement".<sup>86</sup>

J.P.M. Millar quotes, in his book, from a letter Tawney wrote to him in January 1961:

I often think of our happy breakfasts together at Evan Evan's hotel when I was living close by in the Colonnade and you, I suppose, were coming to London from time to time. In spite of the fact that we were supposed to be bitter antagonists I think we found that we had more in common than might have been expected remembering the official denunciations launched from both sides in which I, at any rate, usually refused to participate.<sup>87</sup>

We will weigh that antagonism between the N.C.L.C. and the W.E.A. later in this chapter.



## CHAPTER ONE

### III. J.M. Mactavish and the W.E.T.U.C.

It is an essential part of Brian Simon's argument in Education and the Labour Movement that 1920 marked a watershed in the history of adult education. The first volume takes the history through to that year and he concludes the chapter Developments and Conflicts in Adult Education observing that by 1920 it had become evident within the Labour College movement that national co-ordination was called for. The W.E.A., wishing to extend its relations with the trade union movement, now also set up a national body to this end, the Workers Educational Trade Union Committee.

Meanwhile, the Plebs League remained active on its own account providing, through its journal and classes a centre for Marxist discussion and education. In 1920, however, many of its members joined the Communist Party... inevitably the Communist Party found it necessary to develop its own, independent educational activity. It was in this context that Marxist education developed anew, once more in direct connection with the political movement.

A whole new phase of development thus came to a close at this time... Although the trade union and co-operative movement continued to promote educational activities on the part of their members, the Labour movement as a whole now made no further move towards founding institutions designed to teach from a specifically Labour standpoint.<sup>88</sup>

In other ways, however, some of the crucial developments and conflicts in adult education had only just begun in adult education by 1920.

If we take the decade following Mansbridge's departure as General Secretary in 1915 we get another perspective on W.E.A. and adult education history which can be illustrated by the representative figure

of his successor, John Mactavish, who was in post until he too retired prematurely on grounds of ill health in mid-1927.

It is clear that Mactavish's appointment represented a definite and determined ideological decision on the part of leading members of the W.E.A.. We have seen that those who were unhappy about Mansbridge's view that education is emancipation welcomed his resignation and they willingly endorsed his replacement by Mactavish who was appointed General Secretary by a sub-committee (the post was not advertised) to the Executive Committee. Mary Stocks gives the reason for the decision in favour of Mactavish:

It was now time to tip it (the balance) on the side of the trade unions; and Mansbridge himself was of this opinion. It seemed that Mactavish was the man best able to do that. It was he who had spoken effectively from the Labour angle at a crucial moment of that vitally important Oxford Conference in 1907. He knew the trade union movement from the inside, and spoke its language.<sup>89</sup>

The recognition of the need to forge closer links with the Labour movement influenced the choice of the new General Secretary.

Mansbridge had ensured that contacts with the universities and the educational authorities were already firmly established but as Price says in his history, "there was still much to be done in the strengthening of those with the working class movement".<sup>90</sup>

Mactavish had the background and experience to take this on. After early years in his home Scottish fishing village where he probably worked in the local boat yards he moved round, following work to the Clyde, the Tyne, the Mersey, the Thames, Cape Colony, Gosport and, finally, Portsmouth dockyard (in 1906). In 1907 he was already active in Labour politics and in 1908 he fought the most contested ward in the City and he became the first Labour councillor in Portsmouth.

He was an active trade unionist and took a leading part on the Trades Council. For three years he was the sole Labour councillor in the City. During one heated debate, Mactavish is alleged to have shouted, 'out you pigs' to the rest of the Council.<sup>91</sup>

Mactavish's route to adult education and his attitudes towards it and the universities were, therefore, markedly different from Mansbridge's. His speech to the 'Oxford Conference' in August 1907 was sharp and challenging to what Oxford stood for:

I am not here as a suppliant for my class. I decline to sit at the rich man's table praying for crumbs. I claim for my class all the best that Oxford has to give. I claim it as a right - wrongfully withheld - wrong not only to us but to Oxford.<sup>92</sup>

His short contribution (his speech lasted less than ten minutes) struck a chord with the working class delegates who distrusted the universities. As an early historian of the W.E.A. puts it:

(he made) an impassioned speech in which he interpreted the unspoken thoughts of his fellow working men, stated with frankness their criticism of the University, and put forth their demands upon it. At once the spirit of the conference was changed; the coldness and restlessness vanished as though by magic; the necessary contacts were established, and the University representatives and working class delegates, at last understanding each other began vigorously to discuss the resolution.<sup>93</sup>

At the end of the Conference, a resolution was carried, with only four dissensions out of approximately 400 delegates, calling for the setting up of a committee consisting of seven W.E.A. representatives and university representatives (the partnership between Learning and Labour). Mactavish's speech at the Conference ensured his seat as a W.E.A. representative. Subsequently, the committee went into session and in the later months of 1908 produced the Report, Oxford and



Working Class Education (Mactavish jointly wrote an Appendix with the university don, A.E. Zimmern on 'Suggestions for Preliminary Study').<sup>94\*</sup>

Mactavish became a very prominent figure in Portsmouth before the Great War. In 1912, the Co-operative movement held its annual congress in Portsmouth and Mactavish took the chair on behalf of the local Labour movement at the pre-congress meeting which was addressed by Keir Hardie, Mansbridge and Tawney. Between the 'Oxford Conference' and his appointment as General Secretary his time and energy were devoted to Labour and trade union activities rather than adult education (he did not contribute anything, for instance, to The Highway from 1908 to 1916), though he did hold office in the Portsmouth W.E.A. branch before the World War. He left the dockyard in 1910 to become a full time organiser for the Labour Party. He was an effective speaker who first wrote out all his speeches but gave them without notes or scripts; he had a powerful command of language and quotation. He was fearless in criticism and as a councillor and political organiser the targets for his attacks were many and varied: unemployment, provision of school clinics, campaigning for municipal housing and for slaughter houses, for improvements in elementary education and against excessive expenditure on the wining and dining of functionaries. On the occasion of the visit of the Czar to a naval review at Spithead he made a vehement attack on the Czarist regime. He made a scathing criticism of Andrew Carnegie, the American 'exploiter' who gave Portsmouth and other towns money for public library buildings. He also 'hammered' his council colleagues for monarchical submissiveness. He had opposed the War and had been on the platform at a Portsmouth anti-war rally in 1914 which had been broken up by a hostile crowd (he later attributed the loss of his council seat to his opposition to the War). Shortly before leaving Portsmouth to take up his new

position as General Secretary of the W.E.A. he was (in February 1916) supporting and urging on striking manual workers employed by Portsmouth City Council.

'The perfection of individual culture' may have been the primary motive for some in the W.E.A. at the time, but it was hardly Mactavish's aim. His approach to politics and education had much in common with Plebs Leaguers, but he was critical of what he felt was Plebs League instruction compared with W.E.A. education.

He engaged in debate with the Plebs League in 1917 answering the question, 'What is Real Democratic Education?' by arguing that:

True freedom can only come from possession and use of one's full powers... The most historic examples of the evils that spring from dogmatic instruction are the religious wars and persecutions... the same evil threatens to impose itself on the Labour world. In the study of economic theory to accept the writings of K. Marx as the final word on the subject to the exclusion of all other writers is to destroy for the student their value as a great contribution to human thought... What we insist on is that students should be free to form their own opinions... The difference betwixt the W.E.A. and the Plebs does not arise from a difference of economic faith... It is due to our different conceptions of what education is.<sup>95</sup>

That puts the issue very much in terms which would have met the approval of Tawney, but according to Ted Mooney - whose study of Mactavish provides much of the essential information above - Mactavish's commitment to the W.E.A. (or, rather, the W.E.A.'s exploitation of Mactavish) eventually broke him. He came to accept the 'W.E.A. ideology', developing a passion for psychology, modifying his militancy, dining with King George the Vth and Queen Mary, and ending up finding solace in drink to be retired prematurely at the age of 57.



It is a hard judgement to make: certainly, it would not have been easy to predict, in 1916, that this would happen. There were, after all, several 'W.E.A. ideologies' for Mactavish to choose from (he could have adopted the G.D.H. Cole position but, "there is no indication that Mactavish joined with Cole"<sup>96</sup>). And this version only holds if Mactavish's major achievement - for which he was appointed - is put on one side: that is, the development of trade union education.

All who have written about this period of the W.E.A.'s general history agree that during the late stages of the War and in the early 1920s Mactavish worked hard and effectively to re-orientate the W.E.A.'s policy in ways consistent with his own background and beliefs and also in the ways intended by the W.E.A. leaders who appointed him.

Beatrice Webb had written in her Diary that Mactavish was, "a blunt, energetic and somewhat commonplace Scot."<sup>97</sup> He was definitely an energetic Scot and not long after his appointment as General Secretary his energies went into preparing, for the national W.E.A., a pamphlet entitled, What Labour Wants from Education. The pamphlet indicated the questions requiring discussion and invited views on the direction of educational advance. On the basis on the response, a W.E.A. committee drafted an educational programme for the raising of the school-leaving age to fifteen and ultimately to sixteen as well as for the institution of compulsory part-time education up to eighteen years. Then an active campaign for these, and other, reforms was launched and, "Up and down the country went Mactavish".<sup>98</sup> Districts were mobilised, meetings held, publicity generated, and at a National Conference of working class and educational organisations held in May 1917 in Central Hall, Westminster, the W.E.A.'s comprehensive programme was acclaimed and accepted.

The W.E.A.'s campaigning for educational reform was given



vigour by, and made large demands on, the new General Secretary of the Association, but more important still for the long-term development of the W.E.A. itself was Mactavish's role in establishing the Workers' Educational Trade Union Committee.

The detailed history of this is written in Tony Corfield's Epoch in Workers' Education where Mactavish's photograph (fresh faced but greying haired, leaning forward with a determined, direct look at the camera) is appropriately leafed back to Arthur Pugh's (more austere, formal) picture.<sup>99</sup> These two, with Cole playing the significant role as match-maker, saw the proposal through to the successful establishment of the W.E.T.U.C. from October 1919 with Pugh as Chairman and Mactavish as Secretary of the new Committee.

It was Mactavish who had presented the full version of the new scheme for trade union educational work to the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation in May 1919, and his accompanying letter makes the case in terms that were to remain relevant for decades:

For several years my Association has at different times discussed the best means of inducing a larger number of Trade Unionists to avail themselves of the educational facilities provided by our Association...

While we are proposing to offer special facilities to members of subscribing unions who might desire to attend existing classes or Summer Schools, it was clearly recognised that the immediate need of the Trade Union movement was for facilities to study its own history, structure, policy, problems etc..

I feel sure that your Executive Committee will agree as to the importance of this. For over a century Trade Unions were regarded as the pariahs of Society. The able and devoted services of many who have gone before and many who are still with us have at last won for

Trade Unions recognition and an increasingly important place in the social order. But while our schools and universities are used and public money is expended in providing prolonged training for men and women whose life services will be given to making private industry and commerce a success, practically nothing has hitherto been done to equip members of our Trade Unions to function in what is now becoming to be regarded as a highly important and specialised branch of social service.<sup>100</sup>

Mactavish was here justifying the use of public funds for independent trade union education and outlining a philosophy which enabled W.E.T.U.C. to resist N.C.L.C. attack and competition for four decades, ensuring that the W.E.A. remained, in this sphere, a workers' educational association.

Why did he break and eventually become incapable of carrying out his duties? Who can really know? Some people collapse into chain-smoking and heavy drinking for domestic or purely personal reasons, or for no apparent reason. Ted Mooney's instincts may, however, be right: but rather than the W.E.A. 'ruthlessly using' and 'exploiting'<sup>101</sup>

Mactavish it is more likely that Mactavish felt the pressures and the dilemmas endemic in workers education in a particularly acute form.

Bernard Jennings writes: "Mactavish may have felt more than most of the W.E.A. leaders the tension between the social purpose of the Association and its neutrality in party-politics."<sup>102</sup>

He gives several examples, the most important, perhaps, being the conflict generated at the time of the W.E.A.'s campaigning (the early stages of which are described above) to strengthen the provisions of Fisher's Education Bill in 1917. Mactavish came into conflict with Fisher himself: so much so that Fisher complained to A.L. Smith that, "Mactavish goes about bitterly attacking the Bill as an altogether cowardly, if not aristocratic, measure."<sup>103</sup> Other senior W.E.A.

members had to use their diplomacy to prevent an open break between Fisher and the W.E.A..

It was also during Mactavish's period in office, later, that the W.E.A. got into trouble and attracted Conservative Party attention in Parliament by including in policy documents the phrase about education being an instrument in the emancipation of the workers. And, of course, there were the heavy ideological battles with the N.C.L.C. over the establishment, and future development of, trade union education. On the wider political stage, the failure of the first minority Labour Government, and the collapse of the General Strike must have been demoralising to Mactavish too.

The former President of the W.E.A., H.D. (Bill) Hughes, agrees with his historian successor, Jennings, and puts it in a nut-shell:

J.M. Mactavish reflects in his personality and his biography the conflicts endemic in workers' education - the attempt to reconcile educational values and struggle for the emancipation of the working class... In the end the tensions proved too much for him - but he held the role of General Secretary during a decade in which, faced with bitter controversy, the Association nevertheless established its role both in liberal adult education and in workers' education.<sup>104</sup>



## CHAPTER ONE

### IV. J.P.M. Millar - the N.C.L.C. and Marxist Adult Education

There are many ways of approaching Marxism and Education. The subject is vast and contentious and so it needs to be stressed that we are here concerned with just one area and viewpoint: J.P.M. Millar's work with the N.C.L.C..

In this biographical review I attempt to:

- i) assess Millar's view of the W.E.A. and to pinpoint some of the critical tensions and difficulties within the N.C.L.C., especially in so far as these relate to the ideological conflict with the W.E.A.;
- ii) try to analyse what kind of Marxism the N.C.L.C. and Millar represented, and,
- iii) argue that, in practice, the education provided was not often so different - ideologically - from that provided in many W.E.A. classes.

If we can say that the W.E.A. 'in its primal stage was Mansbridge', then we may say with even more force that the N.C.L.C. from its primal stage was Millar. Similar qualifications need to be made though. The N.C.L.C. too moved in a path worn smooth by the anonymous and many thousands over the years worked in different ways for the Labour Colleges. We need to remember, too, that there were two Millars: Jim played the major N.C.L.C. role as General Secretary but Christine and her husband were obviously a remarkable team and she for many years was responsible for the N.C.L.C.'s major success - its postal courses.

Jim Millar was another blunt and energetic Scot. He was involved in trade unionism as a young adolescent of seventeen years and as a youth he wrote his first article for the pioneer socialist newspaper, The Clarion. He was a War-resister, was court-marshalled and sent

to prison. After the War he was a student at the Central Labour College which he left in 1920 and he was straight away involved in the N.C.L.C. at its birth. He was Edinburgh and District tutor organiser of the Scottish Labour College and he followed this for a period as N.C.L.C. press officer and then in 1923 he became the General Secretary, marrying Christine in the same year. The Millars remained active in the leadership of the N.C.L.C. until the organisation was dissolved in 1964. Jim, in addition to being the General Secretary for all these years, also edited the journal, Plebs, for many years.

He was an indefatigable fighter for the cause and nothing has upset him more than the failure of historians of adult education to recognise the N.C.L.C. contribution. When Professor Raybould conducted a course of 22 meetings through the winter of 1952-53 on the history of adult education without mentioning the N.C.L.C., Millar protested. Raybould replied that the course was never intended to cover the whole field. But Millar came back, in Plebs, with the comment; "Mr. Raybould may not, in the zoology of education, like the educational giraffe, but the animal does exist and is of quite considerable size."<sup>105</sup>

Histories and comments on the N.C.L.C. tend, of course, to be partisan. Roy Shaw, writing about adult education in the mid 1950s was scathing about the N.C.L.C., whose teaching and arguments he felt, "is based on Marxist dogma rather than on investigation and it is treated with humorous contempt by most people involved in W.E.A. work."<sup>106</sup> Brian Simon, as we have seen, takes a very different view and others on the left have seen, and continue to see, the N.C.L.C. as the authentic radical socialist educational movement. Robin Blackburn, writing in the book, The Forward March of Labour Halted, on the new socialist culture which developed in the wake of the post-1960s. radicalism says, it has, "done nothing to compare with the Plebs League or the Labour College movement."<sup>107</sup>



It must be important to get this history into perspective - or to try, at least - and Millar is right to insist that the animal did exist and it was of quite considerable size.

Many thousands of working class students took part in N.C.L.C. activities - the courses of weekly class meetings; the day, week-end and summer schools; the correspondence courses (these were popular and successful over decades and they were supported by many trade unions); simple pamphlets on aspects of Marxist theory and economics were sold and more detailed textbooks on economics, history and psychology were published. Plebs was one of the Labour movement's longest running journals. The Labour Colleges were rooted most strongly among miners, railwaymen, and engineers, in the main industrial areas and especially in South Wales and Scotland. The N.C.L.C. made a major contribution to working class political and educational culture, especially in the 1920s and the 1930s. The history of the W.E.A. could have been quite different had there been no N.C.L.C. (and vice versa).

We can begin with a statement of the aims of the N.C.L.C. which also proclaims its ideological difference with the W.E.A.:

The Labour College teaches the workman to look for the causes of social evils and the problems arising therefrom in the material foundations of society: that these causes are in the last analysis economic; that their elimination involves in the first place economic changes of such a character as to lead to the eradication of capitalist economy. The College, therefore, ... lays no claim to be non-partisan or non-political. As it exists for a partisan movement it must be opposed to all those in opposition to that movement. But its partisanship is a consequence of the actual facts which it scientifically unfolds.<sup>108</sup>



From that standpoint, Millar places Mansbridge firmly in the bourgeois camp:

Unlike the founders of the Plebs League, the founder of the W.E.A., Albert Mansbridge, did not perceive any connection between the national education system and the social stratification of society. "It does not matter in the least who educates", he once wrote, "so long as the education is real". That last phrase reveals the essence of Mansbridge's thinking. He esteemed what seemed to him to be the highest middle class values; in education, the disinterested search for truth; in social behaviour, humaneness and a firm moral purpose."<sup>109</sup>

Straight away a difficulty is apparent. Leaving aside the question whether this is a reasonable summary of the essence of Mansbridge's thinking, the fact to remember is that Mansbridge was no longer the General Secretary of the W.E.A. when the N.C.L.C. was founded. Millar could not say anything like this about Tawney, Mactavish or Cole or the many hundreds more in the W.E.A. who shared their aims. Nevertheless, from this perspective, Millar's justification of the N.C.L.C. principle flowed. He quotes in the same chapter, Horrabin's description of the difference between the two 'schools':

One school means the extension of the benefits of culture, in the general sense of the term, to the class which, by reason of its lack of means and leisure, has been debarred from a full share of these benefits hitherto... this school regards culture as something altogether apart from, and unaffected by, the class division of society.

The other school means by 'working class education' a particular kind of education, and undertaken by the workers themselves independently of, and even in opposition to, the organised existing channels.<sup>110</sup>

This underlining of independent is the keynote of the N.C.L.C. position. There was recognition that there were avowed socialists active in the W.E.A. but they were not, in the N.C.L.C.'s phrase, 'educational socialists'. They were inevitably compromised because the W.E.A. received grant-aid from the State.

This was the essence of Millar's thinking and, of course, he had a point. There were political tensions in the W.E.A. when the aims and aspirations of its members made organisational and policy demands which were in advance of, or out of line with, the consensual framework necessary for public funding to be maintained. Millar and the N.C.L.C. relentlessly sought to expose this W.E.A. 'Achilles heel'.

The middle 1920s were the crucial years for the conflict between the N.C.L.C. and the W.E.A.. The attempt by the T.U.C. to set up a National Education Committee in 1925 was a development which illustrates most revealingly the ideological divide and the ambivalence, the complexities and the contradictions of the W.E.A.'s position which Millar sought, with characteristic determination to highlight.

#### Education for Social and Industrial Emancipation

At the Scarborough Congress in September 1925, the T.U.C. adopted an educational scheme agreed by the W.E.A., Ruskin College, the Co-operative Union, the N.C.L.C. and the C.L.C.. It provided for the establishment of a national committee representing these bodies, with a Chairman and two other members appointed by the T.U.C. General Council. Divisional committees with a similar composition, including a 'Trade Union Chairman' approved by the General Council, were also to be formed. The national and district committees were to encourage trade unionists to take advantage of the facilities offered by the educational bodies. Tutors and organisers for the organisation of the work were to be drawn, "as a general rule",<sup>111</sup> from the ranks of worker-students and

trained at the Central Labour College or Ruskin College. The "rights of criticism or propaganda of the separate organisations" were to be maintained, but there was to be a "mutual abstention from criticism of the good faith" of any of the organisational bodies. The objects of the scheme were stated to be:

To provide working class education in order to enable the workers to develop their capacities, and to equip them for their Trade Union, Labour and Co-operative activities generally, in the work of securing social and industrial emancipation.<sup>112</sup>

The W.E.A. subscribed to this wording with some reluctance but only as a clause in a general statement of aims, and did not write it into its constitution. The W.E.A. was happy with the statement that tutors should have "sympathy with, and understanding of, the working class movement", but had reservations again about the commitment to make "every effort" to ensure that tutors were members of the appropriate professional association. The Association refused to make this compulsory.<sup>113</sup>

The Morning Post had complained, when an earlier version of these proposals had been agreed by the W.E.A. in March 1925, that they would make the W.E.A. into a propaganda organisation. The W.E.A. claimed that the agreement would not represent any change, but for months through 1925 and 1926 the scheme provoked considerable turbulence and trouble. The President of the Board of Education, Lord Eustace Percy, and the L.E.A.'s were questioning these developments. Lord Percy wrote to A.D. Lindsay, who had recently succeeded to the Mastership of Balliol and to the Vice-Presidency of the W.E.A., suggesting that the W.E.A. should provide the Board with a list of principles, and he enclosed the draft of a reply the W.E.A. should send to the Board:

- i) the W.E.A. must have no connection with the tenets of any political party and be free from the flavour of propaganda;



ii) teachers should be judged on their merits;

iii) courses should be open to all students.<sup>114</sup>

There followed an exchange of letters (Lindsay having been deputed to discuss the problem with Lord Percy) about a statement which the W.E.A. would issue, re-affirming its non-party character. Percy suggested the words, "the teaching must be free from any party bias and any flavour of political propaganda." Lindsay argued that absolute freedom from personal bias was impossible, and it was agreed to substitute, "must aim at freedom from...". Noting that, "people's views about what is impartial vary," and the "political atmosphere of the time must be recognised." On the issue of, "identification with the working class" by tutors, Lord Percy wrote, "knowledge of the world is more important than identification with a particular social class." Other clauses were then added to the statement agreed between these two men, providing that the tutors should be qualified by knowledge of their subject and, "the personality and understanding of students' needs necessary to impart that knowledge"; and that W.E.A. courses should be open to all who wished to attend and were able to profit by them. A final clause stated that where the L.E.A. was providing financial support, the tutor and syllabus should be approved and the class subject to inspection, either by the W.E.A. or by the body to which its responsibilities had been delegated, i.e., the Branch or District. Lord Percy also wrote to the leading local authority spokesman, Sir Percy Jackson, suggesting that the L.E.A.'s should carefully scrutinise the activities of the W.E.A..

There was a good deal of unrest amongst L.E.A. leaders about it all and this was evidenced in a considerable correspondence in the journal Education. Jackson was Chairman of the West Riding Education Committee: in urging the W.E.A. to recognise that there was something to worry about - with the reminder that he was himself a member of the

W.E.A. and that his Authority had done more to support the W.E.A. than any other - he asked for something with which to answer criticisms.

To try to solve the general problem, Lindsay and Percy decided that the agreed statement should be presented by representatives of the local authority associations to a W.E.A. delegation. and formally accepted by the latter. This was done. Almost immediately, in March 1926, the East Riding L.E.A. intervened in the choice of subjects to be studied, using the 'inspection' clause as justification. Lindsay and the W.E.A. circulated a statement about the meaning of the clause and in due course it was reported that the local authorities had no objection to the W.E.A.'s interpretation.<sup>115</sup>

Meanwhile, in Scotland, the Edinburgh W.E.A. Branch (a 'predominantly middle class' branch) had disassociated itself from these developments by withdrawing from the Association and reconstituting itself as an independent body - securing the support of the L.E.A. and the co-operation of the university.<sup>116</sup>

After all this tension and controversy, the 1925 T.U.C. agreement proved to be a dead letter. The proposed committees were never formed.

What were Millar's and the N.C.L.C.'s attitudes and responses to all this?

The background to the T.U.C. scheme was, of course, the rivalry between the N.C.L.C. and the W.E.A.: by 1924, the N.C.L.C. had attracted twenty two Trade Union affiliations; the W.E.T.U.C. on the other hand was supported by major unions like the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, the U.P.W., the T. and G.W. (which also had links with the N.C.L.C.). Discussions had been going on since 1920 about the future of trade union education and there was pressure within the T.U.C. and individual unions, for co-operation and unity between the educational agencies.



The scheme did not achieve that unity. Indeed, from the accounts we have, and mainly from Millar's own, it appears that the N.C.L.C. and Millar in particular were determined to exploit the tension and the heat surrounding the controversy by exposing the W.E.A.'s dilemma.

When the Scotsman reported the secession of the Edinburgh W.E.A. Branch under the headline, CRISIS IN THE W.E.A. - CONTROL GAINED BY SOCIALISTS, and approved the action of the Edinburgh Branch in an editorial, the Scottish Council of the W.E.A. replied that the Association's policy had not changed and that its independence was not compromised. An N.C.L.C. spokesman, Arthur Woodburn then wrote to The Scotsman and to the Glasgow Herald to explain that the W.E.A. had given up its freedom of choice, and that undoubtedly, "the object of the scheme is socialistic."

Millar's account of the whole episode runs over a number of pages in his history of the N.C.L.C.. He makes it clear that he and fellow N.C.L.C. members insisted that the key phrase, 'education for social and industrial emancipation' should be maintained and incorporated in the constitutions of all bodies expecting to participate in the scheme. He writes,

Millar also realised that serious damage would be done to the W.E.A. in the working class movement in its refusal to incorporate the phrase were to be widely publicised. In the end, the W.E.A. representatives stated that they would not insert the phrase in their constitution, but would insert it in their general statement of aims. The N.C.L.C. accepted this compromise: the W.E.A. would still remain vulnerable to criticism.<sup>117</sup>

Millar contributed to the considerable correspondence in Education on the issue. When a W.E.A. supporter rather disingenuously suggested that the phrase, 'social and industrial emancipation' was merely a 'rhetorical flourish' or a 'curly tail' at the end of a



sentence, Millar pointed out that the W.E.A. would be required to insert the contentious phrase in its statement of aims. Later, after the General Secretary of the W.E.A. had written at length, following an invitation from the editor of Education to explain the significance of the phrase:

Millar drew attention to Mactavish's failure to admit that the W.E.A. had accepted 'education for emancipation' as its official policy. He also pointed out that Mactavish seemed to have forgotten the gist of the article which he had written for an American trade union journal containing the statement: "the aim of working class education should be to stimulate class consciousness... equipping the workers to evolve their own moral standards, judgements, code of honour etc..."<sup>118</sup>

All parties to the T.U.C. scheme had agreed, remember, that there should be "mutual abstention from criticism of the good faith of any educational organisation recognised by the T.U.C.". The trade unionist, Arthur Pugh, raised a complaint with the T.U.C. Education Committee against the N.C.L.C. on the grounds that this agreement had been broken. The secretary of that committee then wrote to the N.C.L.C. Executive Committee enumerating a number of complaints "mostly directed at Millar's conduct as General Secretary."<sup>119</sup> There followed an N.C.L.C. repudiation of these complaints and continued T.U.C. dissatisfaction with the representations from the N.C.L.C..

The N.C.L.C.'s annual conference in July 1926 received a report which claimed that the controversy had "put the W.E.A. in an equivocal light", and Millar comments:

In truth the N.C.L.C. had exploited the dilemma facing the W.E.A.. The W.E.A. was trying to serve two masters - the trade union movement and the Board of Education - whose interests did not

coincide. In accepting the phrase, 'social and industrial emancipation' it had taken a risk that it had been trying to avoid but which the N.C.L.C. pressure had forced it to accept. The acrimonious controversy had repercussions on the credibility of the W.E.A..<sup>120</sup>

That there were deep and genuine dilemmas facing the W.E.A. is beyond question: the positions taken and decisions made at this time raise important questions of historical importance. Roger Fieldhouse, in his book, takes the reaction of the Board of Education and the L.E.A.s to the contentious 'emancipation' phrase as a demonstration of the limitations of the W.E.A.'s independence:

The reality of the W.E.A.'s privileged position was that its vital funds were conditional on its 'impartial' blend of education not unduly upsetting the social status quo.<sup>121</sup>

But this is really too sweeping and simplistic (the choice of that value-loaded word, 'privileged', is revealing).

There were, are, and probably always will be, political conflicts and pressures over public-funding - battles over what should, or should not be, allowed; acute disagreements about priorities. Consider the recent history of the Arts Council. This does not mean, though, that some kind of meaningful independence cannot be negotiated. Some of those holding the purse-strings may believe in 'liberal education' and confer a freedom and independence in public education in good faith. But more importantly (at least as far as countering the N.C.L.C. criticism, supported by Simon and Fieldhouse, is concerned) the strength of those making the demands for public funding may be such as to lead the political decision-makers to accept (however reluctantly) that they would be well advised to confer it, in any case. As Bernard Jennings says, engaging directly with

Fieldhouse on this critical point in the W.E.A.'s history,  
"the question is, who was manipulating whom?".<sup>122\*</sup>

What emerged from this 'emancipation' issue too is the clear evidence that Millar was an impetuous polemicist and, like others in the N.C.L.C. at the time, was imbued with a sectarianism which was disabling personally and politically. For the N.C.L.C. also had its own dilemmas and tensions. The sectarian often sees only too clearly the real weaknesses and sensitive nerve-points in neighbouring positions but the ideological 'tunnel-vision' that makes for sectarianism then precludes an awareness of the weaknesses and contradictions in the subject's own commitments and positions.

Millar's own history, The Labour College Movement is helpful, obviously, but it is not analytic or self-critical. More valuable and important in this way is Macintyre's A Proletarian Science<sup>123\*</sup> which deals with the nature of the Labour College's commitment to workers' education: with what kind of Marxism was the N.C.L.C. most closely associated? What kind of political education was to be offered?

In the early 1920s the issue of Communist Party control was in many minds, including Millar's:

Here and there throughout the country, Communists tried to gain control of local classes but they met with little success. One reason for this was that the full-time organisers had sufficient knowledge of Marxist theories to be able to counter communist propaganda...<sup>124</sup>

The Labour Colleges found themselves having to refute allegations and insinuations that the N.C.L.C. was a Communist organisation. In a Plebs editorial in 1922, Millar wrote, "We are not, we never have been and we do not intend to be, allied to any one section of the working class movement."<sup>125</sup> Later, this refutation of partisanship



within the working class movement comes close to being a rejection of any socialist partisanship as such:

The N.C.L.C. did not advertise itself as a Marxist educational organisation, nor even as a socialist educational organisation. It advertised itself as providing independent working class education. The label was not at once socialist in conception and was, therefore, calculated to give the new movement an opportunity of gaining support from trade unions and other working class organisations who would have been disinclined to give support if the words 'Marxism' and 'socialism' had been used, for unlike the German S.D.P. which made no bones about its attachment to classical socialist theory, the British Labour Party was inclined to scoff at theory even though during the first decade of this century it had a substantial Marxist character through the influence, for example, of the S.D.P. and certain sections of the I.L.P.. Here, as in many other respects, the British Labour Movement seemed self-contradictory.<sup>126</sup>

This is a very revealing passage and Millar's last sentence may be applied to the N.C.L.C. itself because some major N.C.L.C. positions were self-contradictory.

There is a problem with that key word, Independent. It is hard for any organisation to be absolutely independent and it is most interesting to note that some members of the Plebs groups felt that the formation of a national organisation (the N.C.L.C.) would be, "bound to fall under the control of right-wing trade union leaders",<sup>127</sup> because of financial exigencies. In Derby the S.D.F. minority took that view and walked out when their opposition was of no avail. The survival of the N.C.L.C. was dependent upon the affiliation of some large trade unions. He who pays the piper...

It would also seem to follow that the N.C.L.C. should have

pressed and campaigned for independent education for the children, students and young people from the working class. This, as we shall see, was part of Cole's basic argument with the N.C.L.C.. And there was some inconsistency on policy towards co-operation with State institutions. Representation on University Committees was deemed collaborationist yet the N.C.L.C. applied for (and was refused) a seat on the Central Council for Broadcasting in Adult Education.

It is most important to see that the N.C.L.C. was a product of a Marxism with an extremely, "mechanical version of the materialist conception of history."<sup>128</sup> In the early years of the century many in the S.D.F., and the S.L.P. and the Labour Colleges shared the attitudes and the approach of the influential American Marxist, Daniel De Lion ('Old Dandelion' as he was called): "A genuine socialist movement must be narrow and intolerant as science, for there should be no compromise in the class war."<sup>129</sup>

The tendency for the N.C.L.C. to be narrowly intolerant and dogmatic was ever present, producing conflicts and tensions not just with opponents but also within.

Millar's own account reveals some of these tensions but Macintyre's book is particularly valuable because he, sympathetically, outlines and analyses these elements in the history, pointing out that five years after the N.C.L.C. was established the movement had reached its high point with over 31,000 students in classes in 1926, but there were powerful centralising forces at work and many in the movement found these unwelcome.

The changes were attributable to the "young and indefatigable Scot, J.P.M."<sup>130</sup> He supervised its reorganisation into eleven divisions each with a council and a full-time organiser reporting to the national office. Various accusations, from within the N.C.L.C.,

were brought against Millar - that he was an interloper from outside the working class (his father was an accountant); that he was hostile to Marxism and the Left; that he was determined to gather power into his own hands. Millar refers to these troubles in this way:

In the years following the foundation of the N.C.L.C., the Executive Committee had to grapple with the task of welding the organisers into an effective team... this was not easy since some of the organisers who had been appointed and paid locally resented the loss of their independence when they came under national direction... The policies deemed desirable by the executive committee, viewing the total scene, and energetically implemented by Millar, did not always seem desirable or even make sense to organisers operating at the local level. Nor did they take kindly to being asked to reduce some of the activities they enjoyed such as lecturing, in order to undertake others they found less rewarding, such as unromantic clerical tasks. They also resented the tight control that Millar exercised over their expenditure.<sup>131</sup>

Problems had been coming to a head in late 1930, after the dismissal of one of the N.C.L.C. organisers for taking papers out of Millar's office. A committee of enquiry was set up by the executive committee to report on this dismissal case. The three-man enquiry committee was critical of the Millars. Christine Millar was criticised for being absent from the office for three days without justification.

At the beginning of 1931, the N.C.L.C. entered into a critical phase which called Millar's own future into question and caused deep pain to Christine Millar. The trouble stemmed largely from the personal hostility of several organisers to Millar himself.

The whole issue was a major one at the 1931 Annual Conference where Millar rallied his support and won the day. The dismissed



organiser, James Younie, continued to attack Millar and published a pamphlet in which he claimed that the N.C.L.C. had betrayed its birthright. The decline in class enrolments, he lamented, was "the funeral knell of the N.C.L.C."<sup>132</sup> In place of revolutionary Marxism there was now a feeble policy of gradualism.

At root, there were ideological differences in the N.C.L.C. which, in the inter-war years, embraced two broad conceptions of purpose: one group projecting the N.C.L.C. as an educational arm of the trade unions, with syllabuses tailored to the unions' requirements; opponents from the more authentically Marxist tradition were critical of the unions and the Labour Party, politically, and wished to safeguard the autonomy of the Labour College Movement with a rank-and-file emphasis.

Ideological differences had led, in fact, to conflicts from the beginning - there had been conflict between the Plebs League and the N.C.L.C.. The Plebs in the early 1920s had been, "led by a knot of mainly middle class and ex-Communist left-wingers bound by ties of kinship and friendship." In the same period a small group of Communists, "acted as a ginger group within the N.C.L.C., and there were periodic ructions between them and the more moderate members of the Labour Colleges who expected uncritical loyalty to the Labour Party."<sup>133</sup> Ruth Frow, in her thesis on Independent Working Class Education, argues that the success of this ginger group in helping to relax, "the more rigid and dogmatic approach... broadening the curriculum" produced the paradox: "the very fact of broadening the content tended to remove the significant differences between Independent Working Class Education (the Labour Colleges) and other education specifically for workers and so the seed for eventual decline was sown."<sup>134</sup> The Central Labour College, meanwhile, "directed hostility impartially at the middle class intellectuals of Plebs and the empire

builders of the N.C.L.C. alike."<sup>135</sup> (The C.L.C. fell on hard times after the General Strike, and having refused the N.C.L.C. offer to take it over, closed in 1929.) Members of the Communist Party had also been seeking to correct, "defective (non-Leninist) understanding of Marxism and turning the Plebs League and the Labour Colleges into adjuncts of Party activity."<sup>136</sup>

"We are a solid people", wrote Keir Hardie to Engels, "very practical and not given to chasing bubbles."<sup>137</sup> Some in the Labour movement were prone to chase bubbles, but the generally empirical, non-theoretical and eclectic approach to politics and education in the Labour movement did not, in fact, produce recognition of the need for those dedicated to working class adult education to unite or even to co-exist and work together. For a combative and doughty fighter like Millar, acknowledgement of peaceful co-existence between the N.C.L.C. and the W.E.A. went quite against the grain. Even after the Second World War when, in 1947, the T.U.C. passed a resolution, moved by the N.U.M. with left-wing support, calling on the T.U.C. to take over the functions of the N.C.L.C. and the W.E.T.U.C., Millar and other N.C.L.C. stalwarts continued to criticise the 'bourgeois and elitist' W.E.A. state-subsidised education. Yet, in the post-war era the N.C.L.C. was no longer a radical socialist educational force. Apart from the correspondence courses, talks to trade union branches and some day schools it touched few trade unions. Plebs was a vehicle for the most right-wing Labourist views, and such Marxism as survived in the N.C.L.C.'s work was arid and academic or the sectarian variety of the British Section of the Fourth International.<sup>138\*</sup>

Even when the end of the N.C.L.C. came with a takeover by the T.U.C.'s own education committee there was a protracted dispute between Millar's Executive Committee and the T.U.C.. The substance of the N.C.L.C. complaint was the centralisation of authority and control in

the proposed scheme for trade union education (control moving almost wholly into the hands of full-time officials). But they weakened their case and eroded support they would have obtained from a broad section of opinion in trade union education by protesting publicly that the T.U.C. was biased in favour of the W.E.A. and was designing the scheme for the W.E.A.'s benefit. They placed a sinister interpretation on the choice of Ellen McCullough to help run the new T.U.C. scheme (she was Deputy President of the W.E.A.). Millar and his colleagues assumed that the T.U.C. was involved in a plan to sacrifice the N.C.L.C. to the interests of the W.E.A. and thereby failed to appreciate that there was considerable support in the W.E.A., the W.E.T.U.C. and Ruskin College for their own standpoint on the structure of the new scheme.<sup>139</sup>

In particular, the N.C.L.C. protest at the absence of any local representation in the machinery received a sympathetic response from some delegates at both the W.E.T.U.C. and the W.E.A. assemblies because not only were the Labour Colleges to be left out of the scheme but the W.E.A.'s trade union advisory committees were also heard complaining that the democratic roots of the present educational system were being cut away.

Symptomatically, the Labour College movement ended with arguments continuing in which issues of real educational and political substance (independence, workers' control, the need for political education) were blended and confused with isolated sectarian sniping.

It is difficult to try to assess and summarise the N.C.L.C.'s achievements and failings because what comes through in any detailed study of the organised Labour movement and its adult education movement is an 'untidyness', with a considerable degree of regional variation, and the co-existence and over-lapping of quite separate strands of social, socialist and Marxist thought.



What can be said is that the N.C.L.C.'s record overall represents a formidable achievement in terms of activity and organisation. It attracted, educated and inspired many able and committed socialists and educators and has, therefore, earned an important place in the history of the Labour movement.

It must be said too that there were a number of sadly disabling flaws and weaknesses in the Labour College's position, as I have attempted to show in relation, primarily, to Millar's work and views. Basically, its educational philosophy was too crude and mechanistic: accepting a conspiratorial thesis of education within capitalist society and supporting the doctrine that there was no place for working class demands within the existing educational system and structure, only outside of it. A corollary of this being an excessive optimism about the willingness and the commitment of the Labour movement to support N.C.L.C. principles. When this support was not forthcoming, the N.C.L.C. had to provide for the immediate needs of a trade union membership whose demands were such as to dilute the application of Marxism and socialism just as effectively, in its way, as public-funding could - with a weak Labour movement - impose constraints upon the W.E.A..

And then, in practice, the N.C.L.C. pedagogy shared some of the weaknesses - and one of the main strengths - of the W.E.A.. The lecture remained unchallenged as a conventional and standard method of teaching for many years; syllabuses were tightly organised so that students would move from 'Primitive Communism', by ten weekly lectures, to 'Capitalism Today'; 'subjects' were rigidly demarcated and formed a hierarchy of knowledge organised around an unaltering and solidified 'base' and 'superstructure' model (the 'social purpose' philosophy of the W.E.A. had an almost identical hierarchy of subjects).

But, as in the W.E.A., one strength pressing all the time to break through these orthodoxies was the democratic, vote-with-your-feet, class meeting with its discussion period enabling arguments to run, challenges to be made. It is too easy, therefore, to dismiss the N.C.L.C. as a mere dogmatic, propagandising body.<sup>140\*</sup> In short, despite all the rhetoric and the polemicising, when you come down to what was actually going on, ideologically and educationally, there was not so much difference between the N.C.L.C. and the W.E.A..

Jack Jones, former General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union, has given an account of his 'socialist education' in Liverpool when he attended both Labour College and W.E.T.U.C. classes in the 1930s:

The difference between the Labour College classes and the W.E.T.U.C. ones was that they (the W.E.T.U.C.) had more university and professional people as tutors. For the rest of it, they were almost the same.<sup>141</sup>

Macintyre puts the issue neatly and, I believe, accurately:

We may generalise by saying that the W.E.A. classes bore the characteristics of their locality and that in areas where Marxism was strong, the gulf between the Labour Colleges and the W.E.A. was not great.<sup>142</sup>

## CHAPTER ONE

### V. G.D.H. Cole and Workers Education

'I am damned well not interested in adult education,  
I am interested in workers' education.'<sup>143</sup>

Cole made an immense contribution to British socialism, inspired by his conviction that it was based on the radical and democratic ideas that preceded it. He was a socialist intellectual with a truly prodigious output of written work and the range is also immense: economics, social theory, politics, history, literature. And as a man of action in the Labour movement he had a deep commitment to adult education or what he preferred to call workers' education.

This is the key to his significance in the history of the W.E.A. because he, more than anyone, attempted to bridge the gap between the N.C.L.C. and the W.E.A..

By temperament and conviction he was a radical and a rebel. He frequently quoted Blake, "All things that once were great, out of destruction grew".<sup>144</sup> Christopher Hill has said how amazed and delighted he was to hear Mr. Cole say, at a public meeting, "Of course, I should prefer to see the whole system smashed".<sup>145</sup> He instinctively seemed to have more sympathy with the insurrectionary rather than the 'statesmanlike' approach. He was an atheist with a deep admiration for William Morris. In one of his early books he boldly asserted, "The first duty of Trade Unionists is to fight employers".<sup>146</sup> Mary Stocks describes him as having a mind, "...like a very finely tempered sharp steel knife waiting for something to cut".<sup>147</sup> These images are violent. One needs to add that Cole was a conscientious objector and a hater of armies.

In one area Cole was less radical: in his attitude to women,



although this appears not to have affected his views on the importance of adult education for women as well as men. His wife writes:

Some people called him a woman-hater... In so far as it existed, the hatred was largely political; he thought that the mass of women were not good socialist material. He believed strongly as any anti-socialist that no woman (except Jane Austen) had ever achieved first class honours in the art of literature and he felt that the main purpose in life of the majority of them was to distract man from his proper work.<sup>148</sup>

In his undergraduate days, in Oxford, he apparently showed no interest in Ruskin College nor in the 1909 strike but in 1912 he took part in the Oxford Tutorial Classes Committee Summer School and this began the, ...long and close association with working class education which continued as 'background music' varying only in intensity throughout his life and, incidentally, did much to shake up the W.E.A. itself.<sup>149</sup>

Margaret Cole explains why he gave his energies to the W.E.A. in this way:

... it was to the 'voluntary movement' and to the W.E.A. in particular what his heart was given... The reason is plain enough to see. The W.E.A. was a self-governing institution growing naturally out of the desire of the working class for learning and enlightenment, associated largely with the working class's own creation, the trade unions, and because of its very nature allowing the objects of the exercise - the students - a say in the content and methods of the education they received much greater than had been enjoyed by any other class of student since the days of the medieval universities; it was exactly what he meant by 'democratic'. Moreover, the assistance which it received from the middle-classes and the State was given on defined conditions which preserved for

it a great deal of freedom: in some sense, the whole system was Guild Socialist in spirit - with the added advantage that it was already in existence, and no Act of Parliament, strike or other drastic action was needed - only to preserve and strengthen the democratic element. Furthermore, the classes themselves, as everyone who had ever taught in them will testify, were an immensely satisfying as well as a demanding experience, involving real partnership between teacher and taught, intellectual cross-fertilisation for both parties, and great spontaneity in experiment (subject to keeping the register with reasonable honesty).<sup>150</sup>

Once committed to the W.E.A. his active interest continued unabated until his death, initiating, organising and encouraging developments he believed would strengthen teaching in workers' education: he welded the membership of the scattered tutors' association into a real society of professionals with a very lively range of discussion on policy, programmes, syllabuses and methods in adult education. He wrote for the Association a valuable Tutors' Manual, presided over refresher courses for enthusiastic young tutors, and started for the Association a vigorous and effective little journal, the Tutors' Bulletin. He also started the company Students Bookshop to help provide the adult education movement with a book supply (the Company still flourishes, mainly in the Potteries and at Lancaster, and the W.E.A. is still heavily represented on the Board of Management). After 1945, when back in Oxford he succeeded Lindsay as consultative member of the Council of Ruskin and he tried to improve the conditions at the College, and its standing within the University. He held special seminars in his own room for students of Ruskin.

Teaching, and a concern for reciprocal learning were most important to him: he founded the Tutors' Association (the A.T.A.E.) and for many years he was its Chairman. He valued that freedom to

experiment, referred to above, in his own practice - a course taught by him, in the King's Road, Chelsea, took as its subject The King's Road and its Neighbourhood, "long before sociological surveys became the fashion". He was himself, of course, an inspired teacher.

Margaret Cole says:

... it is no great wonder that so many of the Labour M.P.s of 1945 looked back on their work in Douglas's classes as the most important part of their education... An enquiry made by the journal New Society after his death among the then members of the P.L.P. about writers who had influenced them showed his name third on the list - after Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells, and above Marx.<sup>151</sup>

#### Cole and University Standards

Although very concerned about university standards and scholarship, he and Tawney did not always see eye to eye. One one occasion Tawney vehemently opposed the proposal that the W.E.A. should produce its own textbooks on the grounds that this would be destructive of its claim to impartiality. Cole cut through this anxiety about philosophic principle by stressing the practical advantages of giving the student "something to bite on."<sup>152</sup>

If there was a clash between academic standards and student motivation and participation, then Cole would take the cause of the latter. As new Director of Tutorial Classes in the early 1920s, he met opposition from university colleagues by proposing that students should become teachers after participating in 'training groups'. In the address he gave in 1924 to the Coming-of-Age Convention of the W.E.A. he said,

... to undertake teaching work, both in pioneering classes and in more advanced types of class, is an essential part of the change I have in view in the place of the W.E.A. in the Working Class Movement.



We have at present too few tutors drawn from the ranks of students and too much of the university atmosphere in our work. I value the university connection as a means of maintaining the standards of work; but we must not allow it to overshadow or to obscure the essential character of our problem and our organisation.<sup>153</sup>

On the Tutorial Classes Committee in his late years he persuaded members to be less rigidly intellectual in their ideas about subjects suitable for study by classes, and to run a residential week for training tutors in adult education. At the height of the Cold War he managed to reconcile the conflicting views of Communists and Social Democrats sufficiently to enable classes in politics to be run and he prevented the W.E.A. side from, "barring a now distinguished economic and social historian from being appointed as tutor because of a past association with the Communist Party... it was a minor but important victory for tolerance."<sup>154</sup>

#### Cole and the Labour College Movement

With a radical temperament, deep socialist convictions and a hatred of any de haut en bas attitudes, Cole had a good deal of sympathy with the Labour Colleges. The One Hundredth issue of Plebs magazine in May 1917 carried a tribute from Cole:

It stands for very many of the things for which I stand... You strengthen the hands of those of us who would like to see the W.E.A. more militant and working class.<sup>155</sup>

He always believed that reasonable collaboration between the Labour College movement and the W.E.A. ought to be possible and he did his best actively to bring it about. But there were, of course, real barriers, theoretical and practical. Cole had a very clear grasp of what these problems were. He engaged with the question in an article he wrote to Plebs in November 1916, saying there were fundamentally

two issues between the W.E.A. and the Plebs Leaguers, one theoretical and the other practical:

i) Is working class adult education without a class bias possible?

and he answered his question, "I agree with the C.L.C. in thinking that it is not." He went on, however, to make clear his difference with the C.L.C. and the Plebs, "... the C.L.C. is too narrow... far too sure that it possesses the whole truth."

ii) The practical issue as he saw it was simply this, "...the W.E.A.

is an organisation which Labour can make exactly what it likes -

the constitutions give to Labour the whole control of the W.E.A."

The fact that the W.E.A. was State-aided did not weaken its

democratic structure and organisation (in the same issue of Plebs

a reader had sent in a letter defending the W.E.A. in the same terms,

"that organisation is democratic and if I don't get my own way all

the time, it may be because the others are not class-conscious.").

Cole admitted, "Meanwhile, here and there a class may go astray, but

taken as a whole, the personnel of the W.E.A. movement is far more

class-conscious than the T.U. movement as a whole."

He added a note at the end, commenting upon a Plebs' broadside against

a particular set of W.E.A. lectures, "Further, I agree with everything

you said about Prof. Arnold's lectures... many idiots lecture to all

Labour bodies."<sup>156</sup>

A reply to Cole's article in the next issue took up his

accusation that the C.L.C. was, "far too sure that it possesses the

whole truth" and turned this into a virtue: "We consider that a high

compliment, for it means that we are a coherent organisation."<sup>157</sup>

Cole's was a live-and-let-live approach: he wanted the place

for education and propaganda to be recognised. He knew from

experience the reality of the closed, indoctrinated mind. But this

did not lead him to think that education was the preserve of the

university trained mind: "I am as ready as anyone to bid that connection - between the university and the W.E.A. - good-bye."<sup>158</sup>

In the same 1918 Year Book in which Horrabin wrote on the Plebs League, Cole as W.E.A. spokesman on trade union affairs asserted that education and propaganda were both legitimate forms of activity, and served different but complementary purposes. He rejected the claim that the Labour Colleges and the W.E.A. were fundamentally irreconcilable. He wrote:

... if all the Central Labour College says about the W.E.A. is true, then the working class ought to take the whole educational system out of the hands of the State and run it for themselves on Socialist Sunday School lines. If all some W.E.A. extremists say in defence of the W.E.A. is true then there is no place for propaganda at all, and all propagandist societies (including the W.E.A. itself in its other activities) ought to shut down. But if neither of their views is right, what are the respective spheres of education and training?"<sup>159</sup>

Cole argued that when we train teachers, doctors, or ministers of religion we first try to give them a good general education and then a good specialised training. This needed to be done with the Labour propagandist also. On this analysis there was a case for the W.E.A. and the N.C.L.C..

The W.E.A.'s tactics in the early 1920s were to absorb the C.L.C. and the N.C.L.C. rather than to injure or destroy them. In the winter 1923 issue of The Highway, Cole spelled it out:

Some W.E.A.ers enjoy denouncing the wickedness of the Plebs League as a perverter of the mind, teaching the workers not to think freely for themselves, but to imbibe certain doctrinaire opinions supposed to be a guarantee of rectitude in the class struggle. Personally, like many of the W.E.A.ers I share many of these



opinions of the Plebs, but I do draw the distinction, which Plebs denies, between education and propaganda. In political and industrial work I am a propagandist seeking to persuade others to my opinion; in education I am a midwife, trying to help them bring their own ideas to birth.

I do not, however, at all enjoy denouncing the Plebs, and I do not see anything to denounce ... It is just as legitimate for a trade union to adopt a scheme under the Labour Colleges as under the W.E.A., for a trade union has to provide for propaganda as well as for education in the stricter sense. 'Live and let live' is my motto.<sup>160</sup>

In the same article, Cole challenged some colleagues in the W.E.A. to deny that they were not using the W.E.A. as an instrument for propaganda of their own kind:

If you are out for that, I have only this to say to you; "Get out of the W.E.A.". We will not use the W.E.A. for Plebs' propaganda, and you may be sure that we won't use it for yours either.<sup>161</sup>

Tony Corfield suggest that after 1920, with the Plebs League in retreat from the classical Marxist theory, and the W.E.A. under Cole's influence, reaching out towards, - indeed, in some respects overreaching - their theoretical position, there was little left to fight about. As an example of the W.E.T.U.C.'s openness he relates the 1923 experience when the W.E.T.U.C. had decided they could not afford to promote their own correspondence courses. To meet the needs of those students who could not attend classes, they provided a series of narrative syllabuses published by the Labour Research Department. The list of authors included in the syllabuses illustrated the W.E.T.U.C.'s absence of inhibition in using Marxist and Communist Party sources. It included, in addition to Cole himself and Raymond Postgate, the names of Emile Burns, Maurice Dobb, Palme Dutt and

In the summer of 1924, Cole described it all as a fruitless disputation, over a quarrel which had long been largely unreal.

### Cole and Trade Union Education

H.P. Smith, editor of Rewley House Papers and historian of the W.E.A., assessed Cole's importance in an appreciation he wrote of him in 1958. Cole's best years, he says, were those he spent in London in the 1920s and the 1930s. His work at Oxford later was, in spite of his undoubted influence as a centre of radical thought, an anti-climax. Cole, he writes, "...in the short period in which he was closely involved in trade union education, had shown a remarkable creativeness".<sup>163</sup> He was one of the architects of the Trade Union Education Inquiry Committee which led to the establishment of the T.U.C. Education Committee, and the plans for the central co-ordination of workers' education.

Margaret Cole gives her authoritative opinion that her husband's most enduring accomplishment:

... in the field of education during the early 1920s was the part he played in linking the adult education movement firmly to the trade unions through the institution known as the Workers Educational Trade Union Committee.<sup>164</sup>

He had done, "a good deal of drafting" for the original committee, and then following the success of the scheme which this committee launched, "another report, drafted by Douglas" was presented to the September meeting of the Trades Union Congress in 1921, which accepted it, and told the signatories (18 leading trade unionists, plus Cole and Greenwood, as co-optees), to get on with preparing a plan for the co-ordination of all working class educational activities.<sup>165</sup>

Cole, taking the Chair of the W.E.A. Conference in March 1931



(in the absence of Tawney) reaffirmed his pride in the W.E.T.U.C.. He was the author of an attractively presented pamphlet, called On Getting to Know, which was issued by the W.E.T.U.C. in 1932 and in that year alone sold no less than 60,000 copies. In this pamphlet, Cole attempted to show how the W.E.T.U.C. existed for trade union members who wanted to know about economics, and such things as the gold standard; or about science, like biology and physics; or about music and literature; or about any of a hundred things. The pamphlet then set out the range of classes and schools provided by the W.E.T.U.C. and included a specimen syllabus for a course in 'Current Economic Problems'.

#### Cole and the Liberal Tradition

The attempt to bridge the gap between the W.E.A. and the N.C.L.C., and to co-ordinate all trade union and workers' education did, of course, fail. But in his last decade Cole continued to argue for the value of a voluntary and independent workers' education conducted with the financial support of the State. He was as aware as anyone that the W.E.A. was changing and in 1952, even as he was writing his article for The Highway on What Workers' Education Means the ground was moving under his feet. The movement had grown larger, more classes were being promoted than before, but:

... instead of a democratic demand springing from the working class movement one gets a movement organised from above, and offering the students what is supposed to be good for them, rather than what responds to their deeper impulses and excites their loyalty and enthusiasm.<sup>166</sup>

Why this democratic demand was no longer springing from the working class he did not go into but to try to stop the drift away from workers' education towards adult education he recommended:



In the big towns...I believe the W.E.A. would be wise to hold aloof as far as possible from sponsoring classes which have no real connection with the working class movement.<sup>167</sup>

Nevertheless, his commitment to the W.E.A. and its educational ideology remained and he argued this through now at an international gathering at which there were people from countries where, he acknowledged, the conditions for the freedom and independence of an effective workers' education are rarely present. Addressing the Third General Conference of the I.F.W.E.A. in London in May 1953, he said:

I am well aware that there are a number of countries in which independent workers' educational movements are supported not only by trade unions and co-operative societies but also by Labour and Socialist Parties. For example, this is the case in Belgium and, to a smaller extent, in Scandinavia. I am not saying that in the circumstances of these countries, such a structure is wrong; but I do say that where it is adopted it is bound to stand in the way of getting university help for workers' education, and in many cases also of getting help from the State... If the state of affairs is such that the universities are too hostile to the working class movement for any co-operation on their part to be looked for, then, of course, the only thing to do is to let the universities go to the devil and carry on without them. Similarly, if the State is so hostile to working class interests that it cannot be looked to for financial help except at the cost of interference with the movement's freedom, the only thing to do is to dispense with public assistance and carry on as best one can without it.<sup>168</sup>

He goes on, immediately, to say that in Great Britain, freedom of speech and an atmosphere of toleration have enabled, "our workers' movement" to operate and, "to secure its position... without much hate." Then, in a crucial section of his speech he attempted to

define the new aims of workers' education:

On the whole, trade unionists and social democrats, though they are still trying to destroy the capitalist system, are no longer seeking, as they once thought they were, to overthrow all the values that prevail with a capitalist society and to put a totally new set of working class values in their place. They are, on the contrary, well aware that there are many elements in existing society, including a large part of the cultural traditions of these societies, that are well worth keeping and that are, indeed, an essential part of their liberties. We are in too imminent a danger of total destruction nowadays to take pleasure in destruction for its own sake. We envisage our task as one of adaptation and development rather than of complete substitution of one set of values for another, and this has a very direct bearing on our aims in the workers' educational movement. In educating the workers for their new place in society we need to teach them to understand and value what is worth keeping in the liberal tradition as well as how to get rid of those parts of the tradition which are inconsistent with the aims of social justice.<sup>169</sup>

Cole did not find it easy to impress colleagues from workers' educational movements overseas with these views.

His wife records in great detail how, after some "effective persuasion by Ernest Green of the W.E.A.",<sup>170</sup> Cole became Director of a six weeks' international seminar run under the auspices of U.N.E.S.C.O. in France. Twenty six countries sent representatives (twelve were non-European) and the hope was to establish a permanent international centre for adult education and also to publish, under the imprint of U.N.E.S.C.O., a series of factual studies of workers' education in different countries. These aims were not achieved, though the Consultative Committee, of which Cole quickly became

Chairman, went on drafting reports and pressing for action for some years, with Cole crossing several times to Paris for meetings until in 1956 his health forced him to stop.

He learned from all this, according to his wife, about the differences between the British experience and experiences in many other countries which led representatives from these other countries (including France and the U.S.A.) to be deeply suspicious of the purity of any workers' education conducted under the auspices of the universities, and with financial help from the State and they refused to believe such education could show any kind of independence. Mrs. Cole concludes:

I well remember Douglas's hurt . astonishment when J.P.M. Millar, representing the N.C.L.C. appeared to carry the bulk of his fellows with him in a violent denunciation of the British system - only the Scandinavians displaying doubt.<sup>171</sup>

Meanwhile, back in the W.E.A.'s classes, during the 1950s, some of the most creative work was now being done exploring those 'cultural traditions' Cole had referred to, including working class culture, and the books of Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams were emerging out of these adult education class pre-occupations.



## CHAPTER ONE

### VI. Raymond Williams - Politics and Letters

Raymond Williams occupies, in the 1980s, a position similar to that occupied by Tawney and Cole in earlier years in Britain: a socialist writer and thinker whose books and views have had a deep influence on the younger generation of the political Left. New Left Books introduced Politics and Letters in 1979 with this statement:

Raymond Williams is the most productive and most influential socialist writer in England today... Few socialists in any of the advanced capitalist countries could claim so wide a readership (some 750,000 copies of his books sold in U.K. editions), won and held by writing of so unfailing, and often taxing, an intellectual standard.<sup>172</sup>

It is significant that Williams, like Tawney and Cole, was deeply involved in the adult education movement in the formative period of his working life. The W.E.A. had the same attraction for him - uniting academic, educational, and political interests and aims:

When I heard of the possibility at Oxford - adult teaching of literature for the W.E.A.... it seemed unbelievably lucky as a job... A lot of my subsequent work came out of that choice of jobs.<sup>173</sup>

And, writing of the adult education movement in the late 1940s he says:

Virtually every W.E.A.. tutor was a Socialist of one colour or another. We were all doing adult education ourselves. So we saw the journals as linked to this very helpful formation with a national network of connection to the working class movement.

If there was a group to which Politics and Letters referred, it was adult education tutors and their students.<sup>174</sup>

For fifteen years he worked as a full-time tutor in university adult education, teaching more than 1,000 students almost all of whom came

to him through the W.E.A., in every kind of class from tutorials to to short terminals, summer schools to week-end schools and day schools.

At the time of his move back to Cambridge in 1961 as Fellow of Jesus College and Lecturer in English, he wrote a publicity leaflet for the W.E.A., An Open Letter to W.E.A. Tutors. The Letter is an eloquent statement of whole-hearted support for the W.E.A. and what it stood for:

... the W.E.A. represents a vital tradition which we are always in danger of losing and which we can never afford to lose... I've often defined my own social purpose as the creation of an educated and participating democracy. The W.E.A. taught me much, in defining these terms. It has always stood for the principle that ordinary people should be highly educated, as an end justifying itself and not simply as a means to power. It does not see the good things in society as benefits to be handed down by an elite, or as bargaining counters to win the favours of an electorate. In the end, it has insisted, they will only be good things, if people have made them for themselves.

He argues that, in the 1960s, the W.E.A.'s historic mission will be as urgent and as central as it was in the 1900s because it stands for an educated democracy, "not a newly mobile and more varied elite". His stress is upon this basic democracy which, he says, many, including some reformers, cannot understand.

Cynics can point to how little had been achieved, what a tough fight the W.E.A. is having...It is true, we are fighting for our lives. But for our lives, that is the whole point.

Problems are referred to - "the failures, the jealousies, intrigues, the constant national rows" - but these are problems within the W.E.A., not problems about the W.E.A.. His perspective is one of respect for, and commitment to, the W.E.A.:



I remember now, with deep respect, the very many people I met who gave their time to this work, who went beyond their job to encourage and to strengthen it, and who are the W.E.A.. Any tutor who gets in touch with them will be getting in touch with one of the best and deepest traditions in Britain... If I had these last fifteen years back, to use as I liked, I would want to do the same work again, with my friends, students and colleagues in the W.E.A.: only trying to do better by understanding it better.

Eight years later, in the turbulent year of 1968, Williams wrote a Guardian article on Student Power in British universities. In it he argued that the first modern demand for 'student power' came in adult education. Again the fundamental issue for him is the close relation between education and democracy. There is some advantage, he says, in being able to see the problems from different sides of the wall - fifteen years as an adult tutor, now eight years as university teacher.

In adult education the class meets, before the session and decides the syllabus with its tutor. This was sometimes a formality; sometimes a combination of skilful persuasion and briefing but often enough a genuine participation in the definition of educational aims and means.

It is the purpose of his article to make the direct connection between the illuminating history of adult education - "that long struggle by working men to get an education that answered their needs", and the student power movement of the late 1960s. The university students at that time were, he wrote, getting round to asking the right questions:

I think the student movement has been right to identify the present educational and administrative structure with the values of the bourgeois society which, in the 19th century, created it;



the rigid selection and distribution of specialised minority roles, as against the idea of public education, in which the whole society is seen as a learning process and in which, consequently, access open, not only for all people but for all their questions, across the arbitrary divisions and quotas of subjects. This is what adult education embodied, as a demand at once educational and social; in fact, political.<sup>175</sup>

A decade later this political perspective is dealt with more searchingly in the chapter on 'Adult Education' in Politics and Letters. Here the tension between political commitment (a consciously socialist-affiliated workers' education) and academic impartiality (the university approach of exploring all positions) is dealt with very directly, and Williams now adopts a more detached, and critical, attitude towards the W.E.A..

He quotes Cole, whom he remembers speaking at meetings of the Oxford Delegacy: "I am damned well not interested in adult education; I am interested in workers' education." And he adds, "that was the conflict. He was a minority voice and he lost." Williams acknowledges that there are some who would say that the battle had been fought and lost long before this - "I don't think so myself, but I can see the way of writing the history which would make it out to be so."<sup>176</sup>

He makes it clear that he believed that the W.E.A. tried - "with more success than the N.C.L.C. said was possible" - to develop a working class education which would draw on the university claim of exploring all positions rather than teaching from an affiliated position. But he immediately goes on to say:

Today, when I read of the Ruskin strike and the foundation of Plebs, I think that the opponents of this conception were right.

They said, 'Do you suffer from class-consciousness? Come to Oxford and be cured'.

They sensed that the universities would eventually

incorporate the movement and that what would be taught in the name of academic standards and better learning would not be socialist education.

When was the battle lost then? When did the universities eventually incorporate the movement? The balance, he says, between the two principles was still being fought out in the adult education movement in the 1940s;

...when I joined it. There is no question which eventually won and the reason in the end was a very crude one. The universities could financially sustain their version of adult education and were unwilling to sustain the alternative version.<sup>177</sup>

Williams implies that the university incorporation was a slow process, almost complete in the late 1950s and completed by the time, ironically, Williams himself was back on the other side of the wall and well established as an academic within the University.

But the reason for this fundamental change in the adult education movement was not just the financial and ideological power of the universities. The change in the social composition of the W.E.A. classes in the 1950s was also a crucial factor. Having said that politically affiliated education runs the risk of becoming subservient to party lines and teaching declining into a propaganda exercise, he argues that:

... in fact, increasingly throughout the fifties the dangers were the opposite. For like all the other welfare services, the W.E.A. started to become heavily used by the middle classes as a form of leisure and education.<sup>178</sup>

This is critical, because in denying that the W.E.A. was, "always a mere liberal or reformist diversion", Williams rests his case, as did Cole, on the basic democracy of the movement:

... every time a class came up with working class membership, and



there were still many such, what they wanted was the original form of W.E.A. education; although they did not want - and I think they were right - dogmatic instruction, being taken through any Short Course, they wanted an open orientation.<sup>179</sup>

What emerged from this chapter then is an ambiguity in the W.E.A.'s political position, and a self-confessed ambivalence, ("the experience of the W.E.A. was always very ambivalent for me") in Williams towards the tension between political commitment and academic objectivity in scholarship and teaching.

Williams attempts to define this ambiguity and ambivalence in relation to his own unconscious process of thinking when, as a young man, he was seeking a form of collaboration between left politics and 'Leavisite' criticism. The New Left Review interviewers are contrasting Williams' attitude towards the journal Politics and Letters (which he edited in the 1940s) with his position as teacher in the W.E.A. - they ask:

There is one question raised by your account that related the W.E.A. to Politics and Letters. You've said that you took the position within the W.E.A., that as a teacher you would state your own views as a socialist but would not impose these or assume that they were shared by your students. You would not, however, affect an unreal neutrality or suppression of your convictions. But in a way that is precisely what you did not do in Politics and Letters. It would have been quite possible for you to declare that this was a socialist journal, but on the other hand that it would publish any strong or valid objections from other points of view. You did not do so. What was the balance of considerations which led you to that presumably very central and conscious choice in 1946-7, which you later changed in the W.E.A.?

R.W. I would be happier if I could say that it was conscious in



Politics and Letters. I am not sure that it was not the unconscious process of the emerging terms of the collaboration between left politics and 'Leavisite' criticism. I think that the bad influence of the Scrutiny connection on us was to accredit the whole idea of the disinterested intelligence. You can see that way in which one could move from this free-floating concept of disinterested intelligence to the very much more defensible position of an essentially open style of intellectual work which nevertheless includes the non-dominative declaration of one's own position. It was the blurring of those two concepts that was responsible for the particular weakness of the journal. It took me a long time to sort them out - to see that the disinterested intelligence is a fantasy which is different from the much more viable and correct position which sounds so much like it. Or can sound like it. But I don't want to confuse my own later choices with the actual developments in adult education. The W.E.A. had certain positives as against any closed internal propagandising education. Yet in the end you cannot be financed and academically controlled by those kinds of universities, and carry out a programme of education of the working class. The W.E.A. itself had the same kind of ambiguity as the programme of Politics and Letters. There is no denying that.<sup>180</sup>

I will return to this ambiguity in my final chapter because I think it may be argued that Williams does confuse his own "later choices with the actual developments in adult education".

An important feature of Williams' own personal teaching and development, was his adoption of 'practical criticism', and his working through various teaching strategies with adults in the 1950s - exploring in his classes themes which formed the basis for his writing of Culture and Society; Drama from Ibsen to Eliot; The Long Revolution;

and Communications. Although his extraordinarily successful Keywords was not published until 1976, long after he had left his full-time work in adult education, the important preparatory work had been done very early. Drafts on particular key words had been submitted to Tribune and had been rejected, but they were published in the W.E.A.'s The Highway.<sup>181</sup>

T.B. Pound, in his thesis on Literature teaching in the Oxford Delegacy, examines the details of Williams' syllabuses and teaching during his years working for the Delegacy.<sup>182</sup>

During the post-War period 'practical criticism' engendered conditions for a vital re-direction of emphasis in literature classes; biography, background and ancillary facts were relegated to a position of secondary importance to words of text, and the teaching process itself was altered with shorter reading lists, the formal lecture replaced by other teaching methods.

Williams was obviously influenced by this change and he, indeed, wrote about this shift of emphasis in the late 1940s:

What I am saying is, just as some historians seemed limited in their approach to an understanding by certain particular assumptions about 'fact', so were many of the literary, perhaps, limited by an absence of literary criticism (an absence, perhaps, encouraged by a concentration on 'background' and on 'biography').<sup>183</sup>

At the same time, Williams was teaching very general courses on history, culture and society. A terminal class of 12 meetings in Sussex (1946/47) on Culture and Environment, dealt with these topics: The Cultural Tradition, The Modern Press (from 1881); Fiction as a Business; Advertising Sensibility; The Commercial Cinema and Theatre; an Inorganic Society.

In common with others (like Hoggart) he was, however, at this stage critical of crowded syllabuses in Literature - the study of 12

novels in one session. With his background and political commitments he (again in common with many others teaching Literature in the W.E.A.) could not allow 'practical criticism' with its close study of the text itself to divorce literature from history and biography. In the Delegacy as a whole, a number of classes ran on the 'elusive links' (Tawney's phrase) between literature and its historical context: and Williams was Director of Studies at an Oxford Conference for adult education tutors on 'History and Literature' in the summer of 1950. Pound's record of Williams' syllabuses and courses reveals some tensions in teaching practice: shifts away from lectures to seminar discussions, and back; practical criticism avoiding longer narrative works in some classes, but more ambitious reading programmes involving historical and cultural studies in others.<sup>184</sup>

There is one further important issue which Williams raises quite directly in his writings on adult education. This is the question of university standards. The value and emphasis given to these standards have encouraged an implicit elitism coming down from Mansbridge and Tawney through to Raybould and his university/W.E.A. successors in the 1960s and the 1970s. From this critical perspective, the tutorial class tradition, with its courses involving 'long and severe mental discipline' and regular essay writing was inevitably a movement directed towards a minority within the working class. Williams respects this tradition, of course, but like Cole he wished most of all to be involved in workers' education and he saw that these two aims and traditions could be in conflict. When they were, there was no question which side Williams took:

... there was the class I ran at Hastings essentially with the local Trades Council, which was called Public Expression and simply involved specific training in public writing and public speaking. There seemed little point in teaching the writing of



essays: I taught the writing of reports, minutes, memoranda, and committee speaking and oral reports - skills relevant to their work.<sup>185</sup>

In the 1950s, as the W.E.A. students became more middle class there was a different cultural atmosphere:

You had to positively encourage specific working people's classes, organised round trade unions and so on. This was done. But all the time there was constant pressure from the university: you must improve academic standards, you must get written work, there must be no crossing of subject boundaries... my syllabuses were constantly criticised on these grounds: of course, a class in English Literature, but what is this other - including the first class in which I started discussing the themes of Culture and Society? What sort of class is this? The main spokesman for university standards was S.G. Raybould who wrote various books on the subject. The effect was to eliminate people without secondary education, since they found difficulty in producing that sort of written work. We tutors had to certify that such work was being produced in order to satisfy the conditions of the class to be approved and funded by the university and the Ministry. We replied, of course, that we were trying to create new standards of a different kind of work.<sup>186</sup>

We can see here how a primary political commitment to the education of people without secondary education was felt, in the 1950s, to be in conflict with a conception of academic standards which determined such seemingly non-political issues as written work, subject-boundaries and syllabuses. In my chapter on Literature in the W.E.A. I seek to explore this conflict in greater detail.

## CHAPTER TWO

### RESIDENTIAL ADULT EDUCATION

Tensions, controversies, and problems in adult education generally have often been magnified and exposed acutely in the residential colleges. A review of the history of the residential adult education colleges offers a microcosmic account of some major educational and social issues.

This chapter will concentrate upon four overlapping aspects of the history of the W.E.A.'s involvement with residential adult education;

- i) the idea and the practice of residence in adult education, examining the positive and the negative features that have emerged in fact, and in argument and assertion;
- ii) the W.E.A.'s role in residential colleges;
- iii) studies of some specific problems and controversies which have faced, or burst upon, the residential colleges;
- iv) a focus upon the relevance and the significance of these issues to our general theme.

#### Residence - Getting away for it

The idea that education benefits from a special environment is deep: religious retreats, the dominance of collegiate life in the older universities and the 'Public School' tradition assert the value of a learning environment free from the stresses of the outside world.

The case for residence has been put many times, and in different ways for nearly a hundred years in adult education circles. The first Summer Meeting of the University Extension movement was organised

in Oxford in 1888 when a thousand students attended the Meeting over a four week period with most staying in College for one fortnight.<sup>1</sup>

Through the 1890s and in the first decade of the new century the two forms of residential adult education were established: the Summer Schools, and the Residential Colleges. At about the same time as the University Extension Summer School had made its impact, the Society of Friends began to develop a pattern of annual Summer Schools. The first, held in Scarborough in 1897, was followed by others, in 1899 (Birmingham), 1900 (Windermere), 1901 (Scarborough), 1903 (Woodbrooke), with the latter leading to the foundation of Woodbrooke Residential College. The need for a permanent centre was the more powerfully felt because the Friends do not have a paid ministry.<sup>2</sup>

Ruskin College was founded by two American radicals but there was a religious motive in this foundation too. There was a strong Christian Socialist influence at the start, and throughout the development and growth of residential education there has often been an interplay between the Christian and the Socialist. Beard's advice to his first Ruskin students, "Your reward will not be in £s, shillings and pence" epitomised a philosophy which may be at once spiritual, radical and elevatedly educational.<sup>3</sup>

Ruskin College's founders had dreams of a network of halls of residence in many important cities. But provision of residential facilities is costly and many dreams in this sphere of adult education have remained just that. Summer Schools could expand more freely and a key development was the Tutorial Classes Summer Schools which began in Oxford in 1910. These linked the Schools directly to the classes back in the towns, cities and villages. The methods of teaching, organisation and recruitment were inspired and influenced by what was now a distinctive W.E.A. educational philosophy.

Other societies and organisations took up the idea. The



Adult Schools movement from 1910, the Co-operative movement from 1913, so that by the 1920s a whole number of Labour movement and religious organisations saw summer schools as an important part of their educational provision.

There is a direct line from Woodbrooke and Ruskin College to most of the major developments in the adult colleges in the 20th century. Woodbrooke leading to the formation of the Selly Oak complex of colleges, with Avoncroft changing from long-term to short-term; Ruskin, the most famous of the Labour movement colleges, by its strike of 1909, creating the alternative Labour College and its movement.

### The value of residence

High claims have been made for the value of residence. Sir Richard Livingstone, whose book written in the early 1940s had such an important influence on post-war educational thinking in this sphere, wrote:

There is nothing more important than adult education... and the residential colleges are the most effective form of it.<sup>4</sup>

Why most effective? The views and the experiences over the years are fairly consistent.

Residence offers detachment through removal from domestic and workaday pre-occupations, an opportunity to stand back. The environment of a college and its congenial surroundings have been stressed because here, the meeting of mind with mind in an atmosphere of fellowship and mutual support rapidly breaks down prejudices and removes barriers. Study may be more intensive because continuous but there is time for unhurried and informal friendly talk and discussion over a meal or into the night. As the 1919 Report commented on what it called the 'Summer School Movement': students,

"learn most when perhaps they are least conscious of learning".<sup>5</sup>

The value of learning in community has been given frequent emphasis:

No doubt the lamp of wisdom can burn in solitary shrines and even in dismal lecture halls. But for many it will not burn brightly, if at all, unless fanned by that social corporate light which exists in a residential university.<sup>6</sup>

So wrote the Essex County Education Officer in support of that County's new residential college, Wansfell, in the 1940s.

The value of community in residence has carried an ideological significance: a deliberate attempt to foster fellowship, solidarity and egalitarianism with students taking it in turns to clean rooms, garden, or cook meals. At an earlier period this went with a Spartan outlook, "plain living, high thinking".<sup>7</sup>

It is difficult to prove these beliefs and assertions. Some are debatable or even fashionable: the 'plain living, high thinking' philosophy is now dated and dead. Residence may also involve some negative features. As early as 1913 G.D.H. Cole was arguing that the rejection by W.E.A. students of long-term residential study indicated the Association's strength and success, rather than weakness and failure: college life, experience and qualifications could cause working class students to break with their class and communities back home and at the work place.<sup>8</sup> A similar view has been held in our own times. R.D. Seeley wrote of Ruskin students, in the 1970s;

...some become members of the "unwashed middle classes" - incorporated in the intellectual left, ensconced in nice safe jobs from where they can propose the downfall of the system while remaining alienated from their roots and origins.<sup>9</sup>

Keith Jackson has stood the 'detachment' and 'removal' argument on its head:

It seems that most existing residential colleges belong to the tradition which believes that the best circumstances for learning are provided by removing people as far as possible (and for as long as possible) from their normal life experiences.<sup>10</sup>

#### The Residential Colleges and the W.E.A.

All of the long-term residential colleges have had links with the W.E.A.: they were founded as colleges for the working class movement or for working class students and they, therefore, shared the W.E.A.'s vision and aims. It has been said that in its early years Ruskin was more than a college - it was a movement.

Leading members of the adult education movement played a key role in initiating and shaping the establishment of the colleges. Mansbridge had some influence here too. The founder of Fircroft College, Tom Bryan, was a friend of Mansbridge and, "they shared a common purpose...".<sup>11</sup> The idea of Fircroft was conceived at a meeting of the National Council of Adult Schools in 1908. George Cadbury then convened a small committee from the Adult Schools, the W.E.A., and Woodbrooke, supported by Mansbridge.

In 1909, the W.E.A. turned its attention to the needs of rural workers and Mansbridge sought a Danish view on the 'Oxford Report' and from this perspective was prompted to appeal, optimistically, for a gift of a country house, preferably near a railway station, to create a college for rural workers. He was given a cottage in Oxfordshire!<sup>12</sup> This came to nothing, of course, but when Avoncroft was founded as part of the Selly Oak complex, it had the needs of rural workers as its main concern:

The object of the college is to prepare rural workers for wider social interests and activities, as well as to provide technical instruction in agriculture.<sup>13</sup>



In 1919 the Chairman and Secretary of the Y.M.C.A. met Mansbridge and Wall (of Walls Sausages) to formulate a scheme for a Working Women's College and Mansbridge had an influence on the broad nature of Hillcroft (modelling the college as a women's counterpart to Ruskin).

The founder of Coleg Harlech, Thomas Jones, wrote to Lord Haldane in December 1924: "My idea is to convert Wernfawr into a guest house for the W.E.A. and similar movements, for week-end conferences."<sup>14</sup> Coleg Harlech became a long-term college. All of these colleges have had direct and formal connections with the W.E.A., including the most recently founded Northern College, through governing body representation and student 'scholarships'.

The short-term colleges were founded, in the main, after the Second World War and, benefitting from the 1944 Act which made some allowance for the L.E.A.s to provide residential facilities for adults, the impulse for the establishment of these colleges came from a different and more diffuse source. Nevertheless, there was some overlapping of influence and traditions: Avoncroft changed form being a predominantly long-term to become a short-term college and the two earliest short-term colleges grew out of the W.E.A. adult education movement.

During the War years, the benefits of residential adult education were more widely recognised. Sir Richard Livingstone's advocacy of these benefits inspired the formation, in 1944, of The People's Residential Education Association (but of the originators, only one - the Chairman, who had been in civilian life a part-time tutor for the W.E.A. - had previous experience of adult education). The Association did not survive - it was dissolved in June 1945 - but the impetus and the planning had begun to take practical effect: in the early 1940s Ross Waller, the Director of the Extra-Mural Department at Manchester University had suggested the use of Hollyroyde House as a residential centre for adult education and he gained support for the

enterprise from the University and the W.E.A.. Hollyroyde was the first short-term residential college to be opened in Britain. Only a few months later, Wedgwood Memorial College opened in Barlaston Hall near Stoke-on-Trent. W.E.A. members in the North Staffordshire District had played a leading role in founding the college and the District was well represented on the North Staffordshire Committee for Adult Education which became the governing body for the college.

The foundation of Wansfell College had also been conceived during the War and, although Wansfell was - like most of the later colleges - an entirely L.E.A. establishment, the inspiration had its roots in the liberal studies tradition of the adult education movement. Thus, the Wansfell official opening brochure stated that the college was intended for:

... thoughtful men and women of all walks of life... (aiming to) increase understanding of the modern world... There will be courses on a wide range of public affairs, on history, science, art, architecture, music and drama, on handicrafts and hobbies. Vocational activities will by no means be excluded.<sup>15</sup>

## CHAPTER TWO

### I. Ruskin College

Ruskin College was the first college devoted to the residential education of working men and women. There are today in Britain eight of these long-term colleges for mature students but Ruskin has remained the most famous and the most influential.

It was founded by two young American radicals, Charles Beard and Walter Vrooman. They came to Britain in 1898 and they met in Oxford no earlier than the autumn of the same year but by the beginning of December their shared idea and plans for a new educational movement and institution - which became Ruskin College - was being publicised. The time was ripe for a new kind of 'College of the People' or 'Workman's University': many working men now had the vote and were already engaged in local politics. A few had been elected to Parliament. The trade unions and the labour movement generally were becoming of greater significance. If workers were to have their say in the running of society, then it was essential they be equipped to play their part. Walter Vrooman stated before the college opened:

We wish to instruct the young men who one day may control the English-speaking peoples here and in America - to teach them how to control things... We have no 'ism' to teach, we have no party and no creed. The men we want are the leaders who aspire to be vestrymen, county councillors, members of Parliament, trade unionists, fellows who harangue crowds in the street, and who organise clubs.<sup>16</sup>

They wanted to start a residential college for working men, who could spend a year there or attend for shorter periods, but it was also to be more than a residential college.



It was to be part of a nationwide movement to provide education for the large number who wanted to study but would not be able to take time off work. Provision for them, women as well as men, would be in two parts: correspondence courses, and extension classes in their own localities taught by the college 'Faculty' and by other lecturers. This adult education movement was to have one more special feature: it would be associated with the organised labour movement.

The two Americans in Oxford were fortunate in that they did not have to worry too much about money. Vrooman's wife was very rich and almost all the money needed for launching the scheme came from her. The founders, released from that problem, drummed up support, addressing meetings of trade unions, trades councils, co-operative societies, church organisations in many parts of the country. Beard - later to make his name as an American historian - claimed to have suggested that the college be named after John Ruskin because of Ruskin's influence as a friend of labour, and critic of contemporary society. Ruskin, then near the end of his life - he died in 1900 - was told of the development and he gave it his blessing.

On February 22nd 1899, a grand inaugural meeting was held in Oxford Town Hall. The mainhall was filled to overflowing, the walls bedecked alternately with the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes. The University was represented and thirty eight Labour movement organisations were represented - trade unions, trades councils, co-operative and socialist societies - with a combined membership of over 300,000. Letters and telegrams of support were read out, one of which was from Keir Hardie.

Professor York Powell of Oxford University, George Snow of Oxford Trades Council, James Sexton of the National Union of Dock Labourers and Walter Vrooman all spoke or addressed the meeting. Charles Beard

conducted the first (and only) 'matriculation' ceremony when some seventy to eighty men (some to be resident, others to be in the correspondence classes) stood up and were addressed by him.

Five days later classes began at Ruskin Hall, 14 St. Giles, in a building leased from Balliol College. There was a ready response to the Ruskin Hall scheme. It aroused great enthusiasm in many parts of the country, especially in the industrial areas, with as many as 96 classes in existence by 1902. In the first two years some 1,800 correspondence students were enrolled, and local Ruskin Halls were established in Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham and Stockport. In 1903 the College moved to its permanent site in Walton Street, changed its name to Ruskin College, but the provincial Halls and classes began to close with the advent of the W.E.A. which was, of course, part of this new movement.

### The Ruskin Strike

The Ruskin strike is a 'classic' conflict in the adult education movement. Founded at a time of great political ferment, Ruskin College in Oxford, took working class men and their politics to the heart of the educational and ideological training centre for the governing class. Thus, the strike and the subsequent split can be seen as a clash between the capitalist state and social control conception of adult education and a genuinely independent working class adult education.

The broad ideological conflict at the core of the strike may be summarised briefly in this way, but we should note that Harold Pollins (who is no official apologist for Ruskin) states in his history of the college: "It is plain that a simplistic analysis of the strike will not do".<sup>17</sup> What then complicated the issue? There were several key factors.



## Oxford

When Bernard Shaw was asked to lecture at the newly opened Ruskin College in 1899 he refused on the grounds that "a workman ought to have a vulgar prejudice against Oxford".<sup>18</sup> This prejudice was obviously reciprocated by Oxford (or some in Oxford) against the new college. The working class students were "never allowed to forget that they lived in a hostile centre".<sup>19</sup> Some of the students played up to an oppositional, if not revolutionary, image in this hostile environment. Jack Lawson has described how Ruskin men would deliberately wear their dingiest clothes, and arrange socialist meetings at the Martyr's Memorial knowing there would be a row and a fight, and they would imply Oxford University whenever they referred to the 'capitalist class'. In Elvin's words, this was the reaction of independent working men to intolerable educational privilege, and this made the psychological and social background for the cleavage that so deeply disturbed the college and had such wide repercussions in 1908 and 1909.<sup>20</sup>

## Personality

The views and the personality of the Principal, Dennis Hurd, played a crucial part in the Ruskin strike. Formerly a Church of England clergyman, he had reacted against Christianity, and he became deeply interested in evolution. He had been invited by Walter Vrooman to become Warden, and he was a forceful personality who inspired the allegiance of the students and others who came within his orbit. He was a well known and popular propagandist at I.L.P. and other socialist meetings. He lectured in the college on Sociology and Logic, and his educational views were of an unorthodox kind. His informal pedagogical style and disciplinary methods led to friction with Lees-Smith, the Vice-Principal and other members of staff.



From 1906 onwards a House Committee consisting of the Principal, Vice-Principal and Secretary was made responsible under the Executive for the curriculum and internal administration. In 1907, Lees-Smith left to take up the position of Professor of Economics at Bristol, though he retained his connection with the college as Chairman of the Executive Committee. He persuaded the Governing Council to appoint Charles Buxton, son of a Liberal Minister, as Vice-Principal, and Sanderson Furniss as Tutor in Economics. They introduced regular individual tuition, essay writing, and internal examination papers.

Differences of opinion on the aims and methods of the College continued between Hird and his colleagues and among the students against a background and climate of opinion in the Labour movement which had become increasingly militant, both politically, with the foundation of the Labour Representation Committee and the emergence of the Labour Party, and industrially, under the influence of syndicalist ideas. Many of the students had gone to Oxford with a passionate hatred of the social system in which they lived, and they looked to the College primarily to turn them into more effective agitators for its overthrow.

These students supported Hird in his disagreement with his colleagues and the Executive. In 1907, at the same time as introducing internal examination papers, an attempt was made to relieve Hird of his teaching of sociology, evolution and ethics (said by Lees-Smith to have been used by Hird as vehicles for atheism). Efforts were made to induce Hird to confine his teaching, instead, to literature, rhetoric and temperance. All of the students in residence signed a petition supporting Hird which the Executive accepted and Hird continued with his previous teaching. The students were also successful in watering down a new rule, introduced in 1908 which would have severely restricted students speaking at public political

meetings, the College's official position being that, by its Articles, it was non-political. Since university dons were also now teaching Ruskin students, it was easy for suspicious students to conclude that the purpose of such changes was to bring the College into line with the University.

Within the university there were moves too which the students found suspicious. A number of dons, anxious to widen the scope of the university's intake, partly as a way of reforming the university, partly to provide education for future labour leaders, included in their discussions possible means to assist Ruskin. These included grants to the College, the endowment of lectureships in applied economics and in politics, the lectures being open to Ruskin students free of charge, and the proposal that Ruskin students should be enabled to sit the University Diploma in Economics.

The culmination of these various proposals was the report issued in December 1908, Oxford and Working Class Education, produced by a joint committee of the university, the W.E.A. and Ruskin College. The main consequence of their deliberations and recommendations was the establishment of a joint committee of representatives of the university and working people which was to be responsible for the conduct of tutorial classes. Ruskin was only a small part of their considerations (the Committee recommended recognition by the University of second year Ruskin students as qualified for admission to a Diploma course), but its existence had been important in demonstrating that working people were quite capable of undertaking advanced study.

As Harold Pollins says, in his history of the College, there is irony in the fact that while many Ruskin students objected to these developments, seeing in them attempts to take the sting out of the Labour movement by instilling, through education, ideas of moderation

and respectability in the minds of future labour leaders, the impetus for such changes within the university came from radicals and socialists who wanted to reform it - men like, R.H. Tawney, William Temple and Sidney Bell.<sup>21</sup>

For the dissident students the university was to be shunned because its teaching was permeated, inevitably, with class bias. An opposing working class view had been expressed at the Conference which appointed the Committee to produce the Oxford and Working Class Education report. J.M. Mactavish, a Portsmouth shipwright, and later General Secretary to the W.E.A., in the summer of 1907, in Oxford, had said to the Conference considering, 'What Oxford can do for working people', "I am not here as a supplicant for my class. I decline to sit at the rich man's gate praying for crumbs. I claim for my class all that Oxford has to give".<sup>22</sup>

The situation in Ruskin was complicated during these critical years because unlike the Principal Dennis Hird, the Vice-Principal, Buxton and the Tutor in Economics, Sanderson Furniss, were new to the problems of workers' education. The latter admits in his autobiography that they were often too academic in their approach:

We did not give them nearly enough information about the Socialist and Labour Movement, and insufficient attention was paid to trade union problems and co-operation.<sup>23</sup>

The students who were Marxists or who espoused the syndicalist tenets of the Industrial Workers of the World founded the Plebs League to advocate 'independent working class education' and to put Ruskin on the right track by establishing a "definite and more satisfactory connection between Ruskin College and the Labour Movement" and to eliminate the University influences to which it was believed to be increasingly subject.<sup>24</sup>



Hird was invited to be editor of the Plebs magazine, but the invitation was only a courtesy, wrote Craik; they did not expect him to take it up. He was, however, refused permission to become the editor: the College Executive Committee was fearful of the phrase 'Labour movement' on the grounds that it included political parties and not just trade unions; the College was supposed to be non-political.

The opportunity was taken by the Executive to appoint a sub-committee in November to examine all the current problems at Ruskin. The members of the sub-committee consisted of three trade union representatives (one of whom chaired the meetings) and two academics. After interviewing members of staff, and a number of former students, they presented a full report, setting out the differences between the Principal on the one hand and the Executive and the House Committee on the other. They concluded that there had been some 'indiscretion' on the part of the Principal in promoting socialism and atheism but they exonerated him from the charge of teaching socialism and atheism. On the contrary they stated that the economics teaching (by Sanderson Furniss) was, "one-sided and mainly critical of socialism" and they recommended that the, "Executive should supplement the present teaching by obtaining the services of some economist who is more familiar with economics from the standpoint of the labour movement".<sup>25</sup> At the same time, Hird did not escape censure that he had not kept discipline. They further recommended that his practice of selling produce from his farm to the College should cease.

In his autobiography, Sanderson Furniss wrote that a "majority of the members of the Executive Committee had made up their minds, before the meeting... to ask us three (Furniss, Wilson and Buxton) to resign".<sup>26</sup> But the Chairman of the Executive, Lees-Smith, who as former colleague of Dennis Hird knew the College from the inside, persuaded them to ask Hird to go instead. It was certainly the case

that the Executive Committee decided to call for the resignation of Hird, offering him six month's salary in lieu of notice, a pension amounting to nearly half his salary, and a public testimonial for his past services to the College. When Hird explained the position to the students, a strike was declared, the majority of students refusing to attend any lectures other than Hird's. They also petitioned the full Governing Council of the College which nevertheless unanimously adopted the Executive Committee's report.

This all happened in March, 1909. Hird had been asked by the Executive Committee to resign on the 6th; he submitted his resignation on the 12th to the College; he told the students about his resignation on the 26th, and the strike was their immediate response. They drew up a six-point plan:

1. All lectures with the exception of Mr. Hird's to be boycotted.
2. All house duties to be carried out as usual.
3. The strike committee to form classes among the students in accordance with the curriculum.
4. Should any student or number of students be victimised by any member of the Faculty or Executive Committee, all the students will leave in a body.
5. That the withdrawal of Mr. Hird's resignation be demanded.
6. No student shall allow himself to be interviewed by any member of the Faculty or Executive Committee, and all matters between students and staff to be dealt with by correspondence.

This scheme was then reproduced in hand-written documents, several of which survive.

The news soon got into the newspapers whose reports - some coming from the students - were not unsympathetic to the strikers. Nevertheless, the College Council, meeting at the House of Commons on 31st March, endorsed the Executive's action.

The strike continued for another week until April 7th, when the College was closed for a fortnight, the students' requests for fares and boarding expenses being conceded by the Vice-Principal, who offered to re-fund the return fares of all students who would undertake to abide by the rules of the College: if they wished to return, the students were required to sign a document accepting the Council's decision about Hird's resignation and to obey the College's rules. The students then dispersed. W.W. Craik, one of the participants, later wrote that this scattering of the students may have been a ploy to separate the students who, isolated and back at home might lose their militancy and strength or their interest in the affair. In fact, the effect was to enable some of them to lobby their own trade union branches etc. in different parts of the country. This propaganda effort was thus undertaken, Craik notes, with expenses paid by Ruskin College.

A different view of the effect of the closure of the College for a fortnight is expressed by Elvin in his account. He states that a number of the students, as the full facts came to light, realized that they had been the victims of their own first generous loyalties, and of some skilful organisation by a small group who did not want the kind of place that the College was and had always been intended to be.

Forty four of the fifty four students returned to the College on the 20th April, though as Elvin concedes, "a number of these were by no means reconciled".<sup>27</sup> Pollins gives the dissident students more strength. A battle of leaflets and pamphlets ensued, he writes, containing accusations and counter-accusations, and full of contradictory statements. The majority of students were associated with, or sympathetic to, the Plebs League. When, in August, the League decided to set up the Central Labour College in North Oxford



with Hird as Principal many of the dissident Ruskin students transferred to it. On the following day, 9th September 1909, Ruskin College opened for a new term with 31 students. Thus, by this separation and split into two residential working class colleges in Oxford the strike came to an end.

### The significance of the strike

The impact of the strike was dramatic and fundamental but it seems that a major factor in the dispute had been the personal antagonisms in the small staff at Ruskin. When an experienced teacher was succeeded by two men who had done little teaching and who had no real knowledge of the Labour movement, their inexperience must have added to the difficulties of the College. Furthermore, they were working with a Principal, Dennis Hird, who not only had that wider experience but was also something of a charismatic lecturer and leader if "an uncompromising and unconventional man". Thus, Harold Pollins concludes his account of the strike: "... in different circumstances and with different people the problems might have been handled without an overt dispute".<sup>28</sup>

The substantive issue of the strike - a working class controlling interest over the aims and the running of Ruskin College - was resolved, it can be argued, in the immediate aftermath of the strike. A conference of all the working class organisations that had ever supported the College was called in Oxford on 30th October 1909, and a new constitution was adopted, under which the Governing Council was to consist of two representatives each of the Trades Union Congress, the General Federation of Trade Unions, the Co-operative Union, and the Working Men's Club and Institute Union, with one representative of every working class organisation that contributed to the College. There were, in addition, to be three academic advisory members,

without votes. (This is substantially the constitution under which the College still works).

This constitutional change met the fundamental demands of the dissident students, who had by now, however, formed the new Central Labour College. The representatives of the C.L.C. acknowledged this when Noah Ablett, ex-Ruskin student and South Wales Miners' Official, proposed on behalf of the Central Labour College provisional committee that the two colleges amalgamate. Discussions were held to seek to effect this proposal, but they were abortive - Ruskin would not accept the C.L.C. proposal that Hird be retained as senior staff member, and the C.L.C. objected to the Club and Institute Union because some of its affiliates were Conservative Clubs.

## CHAPTER TWO

### II. The Central Labour College - An Independent Ruskin

The Central Labour College grew as an off-shoot from Ruskin, was set up in opposition to Ruskin and what it was judged to stand for. A number of those most closely connected with the foundation - and the early years - of the Central Labour College had known Ruskin, as we have also seen, from the inside.

The Central Labour College was intended to be different from Ruskin in at least three crucial ways: it was to be quite independent of the capitalist state; to be owned and controlled by the working class movement; and the education provided was to be Marxist orientated. The experiences of the Central Labour College are, therefore, to be judged with these aims considered.<sup>29</sup>

The College survived for twenty years during which it educated a generation of working class activists, including some who played an important role in Labour movement and trade union affairs. But it survived with difficulty.

Residential education is costly and it is not surprising therefore that financial concerns weighed heavily and taxed the time and the energy of the College's backers and supporters. Two houses were rented in Bradmore Road, Oxford and the Annual Meeting of the Plebs League which had an attendance of two hundred trade unionists and students and ex-students of Ruskin approved, on the 2nd August 1909, that the premises be taken for the new Labour College.

But the College's days at Bradmore Road were numbered. The power of Oxford quickly made itself felt on the new independent



Labour College. The houses were, in fact, owned by St. John's College and the C.L.C. was given notice to quit by the end of August 1911. New premises were acquired in Oxford but the new owners, the Trustees of Park Estate, found it was an unsuitable place for a Labour College.

Whilst in Oxford, the College made a new and wealthy friend of George Davison (who was later benefactor for Coleg Harlech) and he gave the C.L.C. financial help to find a home in London at Penwern Road, Earls Court, and the new premises were formally opened in August 1911.

The move was seen as an advantage - getting away from Oxford. In the words of W.W. Craik, who succeeded Dennis Hird when he died in 1920, as Principal of the College:

The Central Labour College found in London what it could not have found in Oxford - a working class environment for its working class education.<sup>30</sup>

Money remained a problem, however. The College debts had increased from £150 in 1910 to £2,873 in 1915. The main source of College funding during these years had been from Districts of the South Wales Miners Federation and the N.U.R., and a formal transfer of ownership to the two unions was effected in 1915.

Although the College had the official recognition of the T.U.C. for most of its time, the funding from trade union sources (mainly from the miners and the railwaymen, in fact) was insufficient to prevent the financial pressures leading to the closure of the College in 1929.

With limited financial resources at their disposal, unions had to choose whether to support residential or non-residential students. After the N.C.L.C. was founded in 1921, there was an institutional rift between residential and non-residential colleges. Some of the leading members of the Labour College movement backed the N.C.L.C.,

giving priority to non-residential education programmes. Horrabin, for example, argued that the classes are the fundamental important thing. Against this, Craik emphasised that the C.L.C. had a vital function in training the tutors for the non-residential classes. The Independent Working Class Adult Education Movement divided on this issue.<sup>31</sup>

#### Democracy and control within the C.L.C.

The pressures and problems which stemmed from the issue of democracy and student participation within the Central Labour College were extraordinarily similar to those faced within Ruskin College. It was ironic that the Ruskin secessionists faced these same issues so soon after the split.

From February 1910 to July 1915, the residential students at the C.L.C. held regular House Meetings to discuss College matters and to make proposals to the staff and Board, but the C.L.C. stopped short of offering the students direct participation in making decisions and running the College.

In November 1912, all nine resident students submitted a Memorandum outlining their grievances. One of these grievances was the unsatisfactory nature of the economics lectures given by the College Secretary, George Sims; (the method of teaching at the C.L.C. was based on lectures, just as at Ruskin). They complained about the 11.00pm rule (all students to be in their rooms by 11.00pm), and they also claimed that the College was wasting money on an unnecessarily large staff in relation to the number of students in residence.

The Board rejected their complaints, and upheld the authority of the staff. The students then issued a Circular as a direct appeal to trade unionists, with the damning conclusion:



an independent Committee (i.e. without members from the Board, Staff or Students) investigate the internal problems of the College.

It is questionable whether there was any radical difference between Ruskin and the C.L.C. in terms of teaching method and internal democracy. The view of the College's most famous student is not flattering in this regard. Nye Bevan was at the College from 1919 to 1921. His biographer, Michael Foot, writes:

He disliked the College routine of early rising, the miserable meals, and long lectures many of which he scamped. The talk of the night was better: "why should I spend precious days at the lectures" he would taunt his more studious fellow students, "when I can find out what you fellows have learnt all the week, in a couple of hours?".<sup>35</sup>

Clearly, there were some differences in the content of what was taught and learned at the C.L.C. and Ruskin. But even here, as John Atkins says, "There predominated the under-lying current of thought which saw working class control of the educational structure as the guarantee of success". The first Appeal and Prospectus issued by the C.L.C. in August 1909 referred to "scientific education as a means of solving our social problems", and to, "teaching those methods of correct thinking and expression, known as grammar, logic and rhetoric". It argued that the College, "stands for the freest expression of thought on all subjects that are included within its aims and objects... To produce well informed citizens is the aim of the Central Labour College". As Atkins says, such a comment would have been quite acceptable to Ruskin College authorities.<sup>36</sup>

What we see here in the residential sector is something very similar to the N.C.L.C./W.E.A. ideological divide in general: substantive issues of difference there were, but with an overlapping and inter-meshing of experiences in reality the differences were blurred. Partisans and sectarians oversimplified the issues and played



We much regret that we have to give it as our opinion that it would be better that this, at present so called, home of working class education should be closed, than it should continue on its present basis.<sup>32</sup>

A special Board meeting was called to discuss the issuing of the Circular and again the students' complaints were rejected. The Board agreed to draw up and issue a reply for the press and the trade unions but although it was drawn up it was never issued, because it was felt it would have exacerbated the situation. By December 1912, a split in the student ranks appeared, and three of them withdrew their support for some of the complaints. By the time of the fourth C.L.C. Annual Meeting in August 1913, when this issue was again debated, there was complete division amongst the students present, and the Annual Meeting rejected the complaints within the Circular.

Just over six months later though the rumblings of further unrest became apparent. The students' House Meeting on March 10th 1914 passed a resolution protesting against "the autocracy and tactless methods of the Secretary".<sup>33</sup>

One of the students issued details of the dispute which were taken up and published by a number of provincial newspapers. The Board deferred consideration of the complaint while, as they put it, "the future of the College, and its control, is in the melting-pot".<sup>34</sup> (Bad publicity could only make more difficult the negotiations under way with the N.U.R. and the S.W.M.F. over the management and control of the College.

It is clear from the Board's minutes of 25th July 1914 that they were going to take no action on any issue raised by the students, except to pass them on to the new Board once the unions took over effective financial and managerial control. Matters finally came to rest when the fifth C.L.C. Annual Meeting in August 1914 over-whelmingly rejected a motion proposed by A.J. Cook of the S.W.M.F. proposing that

an independent Committee (i.e. without members from the Board, Staff or Students) investigate the internal problems of the College.

It is questionable whether there was any radical difference between Ruskin and the C.L.C. in terms of teaching method and internal democracy. The view of the College's most famous student is not flattering in this regard. Nye Bevan was at the College from 1919 to 1921. His biographer, Michael Foot, writes:

He disliked the College routine of early rising, the miserable meals, and long lectures many of which he scamped. The talk of the night was better: "why should I spend precious days at the lectures" he would taunt his more studious fellow students, "when I can find out what you fellows have learnt all the week, in a couple of hours?".<sup>35</sup>

Clearly, there were some differences in the content of what was taught and learned at the C.L.C. and Ruskin. But even here, as John Atkins says, "There predominated the under-lying current of thought which saw working class control of the educational structure as the guarantee of success". The first Appeal and Prospectus issued by the C.L.C. in August 1909 referred to "scientific education as a means of solving our social problems", and to, "teaching those methods of correct thinking and expression, known as grammar, logic and rhetoric". It argued that the College, "stands for the freest expression of thought on all subjects that are included within its aims and objects... To produce well informed citizens is the aim of the Central Labour College". As Atkins says, such a comment would have been quite acceptable to Ruskin College authorities.<sup>36</sup>

What we see here in the residential sector is something very similar to the N.C.L.C./W.E.A. ideological divide in general: substantive issues of difference there were, but with an overlapping and inter-meshing of experiences in reality the differences were blurred. Partisans and sectarians oversimplified the issues and played

up the ideological division.



## CHAPTER TWO

### III Coleg Harlech -

#### Welsh Society and the Dilemmas of Democracy

The twenty years or so before the First World War were the most decisive in modern Welsh history, and adult education played a full part in the drama of these years. In the early years of this century, South Wales was a society in turmoil. Out of the growing industrial unrest there emerged a new pattern of independent and Marxist-orientated adult education. When one Welsh miner arrived at Ruskin College he was asked, "Are you as Marx-mad as the rest of them?".<sup>37</sup>

Peter Stead, the historian of Coleg Harlech sees the history of the Coleg within this general background and he links the Ruskin strike directly to Harlech and Wales:

The circumstances surrounding this strike count as a significant chapter in Welsh educational and social history... The battle between The Plebs and the W.E.A. soon became one of the most dramatic features of the times. It was not difficult to see that here were the great issues of Welsh politics expressed in microcosm.<sup>38</sup>

As we have seen Noah Ablett, from Wales, played a prominent part as a dissident Ruskin student and in creating the Plebs movement. He summed up his views in a challenging statement, which reverberated for many years in the valleys of South Wales:

Education, particularly the kind needed by workers, is not that impartial universal thing so much gushed about by educationalists.<sup>39</sup> Guided by Ablett, the movement's chief theorist and publicist, the Plebs movements developed apace in South Wales. The South Wales wing

of the movement had been formed at a meeting in Cardiff in January 1909. From the start the Plebs had wanted to move towards Marxist residential education, and after the Ruskin strike and the establishment of the Central Labour College, the greatest success of the South Wales Plebs was the support they gained from the South Wales miners. Several Districts of the South Wales Miners Federation decided to support the College, and then in 1914 the S.W.M.F. itself decided to take over the maintenance of the College in conjunction with the N.U.R.. In 1914, six out of the twelve residential students were members of the S.W.M.F..

The W.E.A., however, had also taken root in Wales. The first Welsh branch was formed in Barry in 1906, and then in 1907 an autonomous South Wales region came into being. By 1914, the W.E.A. could claim to be a broadly based movement. It had clear support from some Labour organisations in South Wales. Several Co-operative societies had affiliated as had several important trades councils and most significantly several districts and lodges of the S.W.M.F.. But it was weaker than it might have been: the Plebs and the C.L.C. had seen to that. Their own statistics may not have been impressive but their success had come in creating a widespread prejudice against all official or semi-official adult education agencies.

The rivalry between the Labour College movement and the W.E.A. was manifest, of course, throughout Britain but the struggle was more intense and bitter in South Wales than in any other area. This is the essential background to the foundation of Coleg Harlech in North Wales.

#### The Founder of Coleg Harlech - Thomas Jones

Tom Jones' life and his social and political views offer fascinating insights into Welsh political and educational history.



He was born in 1870 at Rhymney, a mining village in South Wales. His father was a company store keeper and the family were bilingual and strictly non-conformist. He went to Grammar School and felt that the "pulpit was my manifest destiny".<sup>40</sup> He left school at fourteen already a voracious reader and there followed six years in which he worked as time-keeper and clerk, went on reading, fulfilled teaching engagements, and considered a career in the civil-service. At the age of twenty he became a student at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth - the centre of the linguistic, cultural and political revival in Wales, and Aberystwyth gave him a new sense of Wales which he never lost.

He spent five years at Aberystwyth. This was the age of Charles Booth, Beatrice Webb and Keir Hardie, when there was new interest in social philosophies, especially socialism. In Aberystwyth, Tom Jones moved, "from evangelism to the study of social questions" and from, "Liberalism to Labour".<sup>41</sup>

Five years at Aberystwyth were followed by fourteen years at Glasgow where he graduated, did research, became a lecturer and worked on the Poor Law Commission. In the metropolis of Glasgow his Christian idealism, experience of social work and his interest in politics led him to join the two leading socialist societies: he became a Fabian and a member of the I.L.P.. His experiences at Glasgow had already made clear to him the nature of trade unionism and he was later to write:

... the inherent weakness of trade unionism was quite clear in the 1890s, it was a negotiating and fighting force, but it could not give us socialism. Along with the progress of the unions had come a dangerous sectionalising spirit.<sup>42</sup>

In 1904, he returned to South Wales to address the miners in his native Rhymney Valley. The main theme in his speech was to persuade



the miners to broaden their perspectives and to use trade unionism for wider social objectives. He urged the unions to throw their, "weight on the side of character", and "on the side of education".<sup>43</sup>

He later wrote, "My religion is education... It is a way to the kingdom of heaven... the object of adult education is to break down the barriers which hinder the masses of the people from enjoying these riches".<sup>44</sup>

That is, of course, a vision remarkably close to the Mansbridgean view of the W.E.A.. The idealism and the radicalism of his Welsh Non-Conformist background had been channeled into Fabian progressivism but this was an ideological perspective which did not combine easily with the Marxist orientated working class leadership of South Wales Labour.

Nevertheless, he was, like Mansbridge, a man of extraordinary energy and able to inspire and move others to support the causes he took up. After a short period as Professor of Economics at the Queen's University, Belfast (1909 to 1910) he returned to Wales as Secretary of the Anti-T.B. Campaign, based in Cardiff, supported by wealthy philanthropists.

Here he had a network of friends who were also seeking to channel their energies and radicalism into non-political associations. The W.E.A. was the key organisation and it was in its meetings that he met a group who were to become his closest friends and who, "were to dominate the history of adult education in Wales".<sup>45</sup> A little later, (1916), he was to embark on the career which made him a person of interest and relevance to national historians of the British State and Politics - as Secretary to the Cabinet he was to be a close associate of three Prime Ministers.

The radicalism he had inherited from his Fabian and I.L.P. days now combined with what a friend has described as, "his instinctive urge to tell his rich friends where their duty lies".<sup>46</sup> In August 1917, he lunched with the powerful Welsh coal owner, Lord Rhondda, and heard

that he was selling a home. T.J. (as he came to be called) recorded:

I told him he ought to give it for the rest of the year as a guest house to W.E.A. students from the South Wales coalfields. But he seemed to have some difficulty grasping my idea".<sup>47</sup>

By the 1920s, the popularity and the success of the Summer Schools, the work of Ruskin College and the C.L.C. and - as T.J. said - with "adult education... in the air", the time was ripe for a residential college in Wales.

#### The Coleg's Benefactor - George Davison

The choice of Harlech as the venue for the Welsh residential adult college also links Edwardian days with the 1920s. Between 1908 and 1910, a grand stone House and Hall had been built at Harlech by a millionaire, George Davison. After working in the Exchequer and Audit Department of the Treasury, he had become a pioneering photographer, and the Managing Director of Kodak.

Davison was not, however, a conventional bourgeois millionaire. By the time he moved up to North Wales he had become a philosophical anarchist, deeply influenced by Kropotkin and Tolstoy. The locals were confronted by a man who, according to rumour, "lived largely on a diet of fruit and nuts", entertained very strange guests, staged musical evenings with naked ballerinas and who was committed to the Poor and used his magnificent home to accommodate orphans from the depths of London society.<sup>48</sup>

T.J. met Davison at a Fabian Summer School at Llanbedr in 1909. They became close friends, though T.J. was fully aware of Davison's views and activities. In 1913, he told T.J. that:

... all these under-currents of anarchism interest me: in Drama, Music, Painting and industrial movement. Right out of their own experience is being evolved the workers' distrust of leadership and officialdom of every type - the authoritarian domination from



above (Gods, priests, academics, states, Labour leaders, T.U.C.s, Parliament etc.), and so they must come to think and speak for themselves.

And he told T.J. that he was:

... hatching mischief with my pals among the railwaymen and the miners.<sup>49</sup>

Davison was living at Wern Fawr in Harlech during the years of increased trade union militancy in South Wales and, indeed, he became directly involved in working class politics in South Wales. At Ammanford in the anthracite coalfield there emerged in the aftermath of 1910 and 1911 industrial conflict a distinctive group of socialists, influenced in part by the I.L.P. and in part by the Marxism and the anarcho-syndicalism that characterised Plebs in South Wales. There were similar groups in several South Wales centres but what distinguished the Ammanford Group was their acquisition in 1913 of an old vicarage and the conversion of this into a reading room, library, and meeting place. Davison bought the house, financed the conversion and helped to stock the library. The old vicarage, newly painted white, was named The White House after Davison's home beside the Thames. The group of socialists maintained close links with the C.L.C. and the Plebs movement and they were involved in the politics of the area. In the War years, The White House became the centre of I.L.P. and anti-militarist agitation in the district. It was probably because of T.J.'s known links with Davison - and by extension, The White House - that a police watch was put on T.J.'s home when he moved to Hampstead in 1917. After the War, the House became the centre for trade union militancy for the Ammanford area.

Davison left Harlech and, in 1922, went to Juan Les Pins on the French Riviera (for health reasons). With Wern Fawr vacant and private sale proving difficult, Davison wrote to T.J. (in March 1923) asking for his help, "to get it fully considered particularly amongst



the South Wales friends". T.J. took the interest up, commenting that:

... it would be a scandal to let it fall into the hands of people who would have no feeling for its beauty and who might turn it into a common hotel. Silyn Roberts and I have often dreamed of saving it for the workers in some shape.<sup>50</sup>

The money needed to be raised. T.J. approached a former school friend, now a wealthy man living in Barry and who claimed to be, "the biggest wagon-owner in the world": Mr. Henry Gethin was won over to a vision of educational philanthropy despite having little or no sympathy for workers' education or even for adult education. Davison let the property go cheaply (the value was estimated to be £60,000 in 1923 but Wern Fawr was secured for £7,500 in April 1925) and Lewis bought it for the cause of adult education.<sup>51</sup>

It took three years of negotiations and fund-raising to launch Coleg Harlech, which opened in October 1927. Thus, the college was founded and established precisely at the moment when industrial Wales was experiencing the most bitter and intense confrontation between Capital and Labour: the period of the General Strike and the six-month lock-out of the miners.

Furthermore, Coleg Harlech embodied all the contradictions, ironies and tensions in its very conception and birth: funded by capital raised from capitalists for a workers' college, sited in a mansion in scenic North Wales far from the industrial centres of South Wales but yet with the most direct links - at all levels - to those centres.

### Working through the Dilemmas

The history of Coleg Harlech as a working residential college has been influenced deeply by this complex of contradictions and ironies. T.J. encapsulated the dilemma neatly at the start, in a secret Memorandum. He indicated that at that time many people thought

the W.E.A. classes to be, "nurseries of Bolshevism" but he added that, "the truth in my view is that they are a bulwark against Bolshevism".<sup>52</sup>

The Coleg opened against an orchestrated campaign playing on fears that all adult education was propaganda. The Cardiff based Western Mail conducted a sustained assault against the adverse influence of the W.E.A. as a socialist organisation. In December 1926, the paper referred to the new Coleg at Harlech maintaining that this was causing much uneasiness among Welsh educationalists, the main reason being that the W.E.A. itself is, "understood to be largely under the influence of Socialists".<sup>53</sup>

This press campaign continued throughout 1927 right down to the official opening of the college. In the week of the opening, the Mail carried an article saying that the:

... chief sponsors of the Harlech institution are avowed socialists... and it is undeniable that the members of the teaching staff are closely connected with the Socialist party".

To the author/s of this article, the college seemed, "a garment so conspicuously red in texture", that they felt the need to point out that they would watch the Coleg, "with a vigilant eye". Similar sentiments were expressed in the national press. The Daily Courier told the Davison story and speculated whether a bargain was secured:

... on the basis of an understanding that a distinctively Socialistic basis should be given to its courses of instruction.<sup>54</sup>

Faced with these reports, T.J. had a major task of reassurance to perform with sponsors and supporters across the class-divide.

He wrote to a tin-plate manufacturer of Pontardawe, that he personally had:

... finished with party politics more than ten years ago and am solely concerned with founding an educational institution.

To Cardiff coal-owner, Sir David Llewellyn he wrote (Dec. 1926):



... when I opened the Western Mail yesterday and read the tendentious headlines about Coleg Harlech my lips began to frame epithets which I had not learnt from the Calvinistic Methodists of Rhymney. And he concluded:

The result of this sort of journalism is to sow and spread suspicion where I and those working with me are striving to reconcile and interpret and enlighten.<sup>55</sup>

His main sponsor, Henry Gethin Lewis, who had bought Wern Fawr to establish the Coleg, was never really happy about what he had done. To re-assure others, and maybe himself, his main concern at the opening ceremony, on Saturday 5th September 1927, was that all should be made respectable by the singing of 'God Save the King'!<sup>56</sup>

Despite all the efforts of the Western Mail, it appeared to be easier for Tom Jones to gain help and support from rich patrons than it was from many in the organised Labour movement. These were difficult days in which to convince trade unionists and socialists in South Wales that voluntary organisations were not part of a capitalist plot. In the period leading to the opening of the Coleg no trade union had contributed any financial support. Some union leaders did agree to serve on the Coleg Council, but the antagonism felt in the S.W.M.F. and the N.U.R. towards the W.E.A. had a lasting impact. Not long after the opening of Coleg Harlech, the Central Labour College closed, and Plebs then warned that there were now other residential colleges, "run by philanthropists in the interests of philanthropy and all of no use to the Labour Movement".<sup>57</sup>

Coleg Harlech was, therefore, never as close to the Labour and trade union movement as Ruskin College, despite the large numbers of working class adults and individual trade unionists who were students. ("It was a college for miners, steel-workers, railway clerks and quarrymen, most of whom came from Wales and overwhelmingly from South Wales").<sup>58</sup>



The S.W.M.F. retained a distant and detached attitude towards Coleg Harlech throughout the 1930s, despite the attempts by its President, Jim Griffiths, to change the Union's attitude. He was a graduate of The White House at Ammanford, the C.L.C. and the N.C.L.C. but by the mid-1930s he was also a supporter of Coleg Harlech.

The Coleg therefore had a frustrating and ambiguous relationship with South Wales - it derived much of its vitality and personality from the area, but yet it had never been fully accepted by the Labour movement which so dominated South Wales. David Guy, a miner for ten years, before entering Coleg Harlech, university and becoming, in 1938, the District Secretary for the South Wales W.E.A., illustrated the potential. But, whilst as many as one-third to one-half of the students in residence during the decade were South Wales' miners, The Bulletin of the World Association for Adult Education (after noting that fact) added the view:

... the greatest disappointment... was in the measure of the official response of the S.W.M.F.... which had been divided... on the "education versus propaganda" issue.<sup>59</sup>

A measure of this luke-warm attitude may be gauged from the appeal for the new library fund which, in 1940, reported that £13,940 had been collected and although there were several small union contributions including £100 from the T.G.W.U. there was only a grand total of £3.5s.6d. forthcoming from seven individual Lodges of the S.W.M.F..

#### Coleg Harlech and the Unemployed

The relationship between the Coleg and voluntary agencies in a scheme to help the unemployed from South Wales was controversial in the Labour movement and contributed to the luke-warm, if not hostile, attitude in some trade union and socialist circles towards the Coleg.

The National Council of Social Services had been founded in 1919

to develop and co-ordinate voluntary effort in community service. The N.C.S.S. approached the Carnegie Trust and asked for a grant to enable the development of new projects in the depressed areas of South Wales and the North of England. From 1929, Carnegie money was spent on adult education projects, especially through the W.E.A..

Tom Jones became very much involved with this work. On his sixtieth birthday, in 1930, he left Whitehall and became the first Secretary of the Pilgrim Trust. This Trust had been established to administer a fund presented to Britain by a New York millionaire, Edward Harkness. The Trustees had declared it as one of their intentions to "apply their resources at key points of the present distress".<sup>60</sup>

In 1931, Tom Jones spoke at Bangor of the need to, "tackle the spirit of defeatism"<sup>61</sup> and with this very much in mind he began to investigate the possibility of Coleg Harlech linking up with the work of the N.C.S.S. and the Settlements, especially with the developing unemployed clubs. For several years, through the 1930s, educational programmes for the unemployed were organised at Coleg Harlech and these were funded by Trusts and grants via the N.C.S.S..

The courses for the unemployed differed from the general courses in several ways: they were shorter in duration, more like Summer Schools, running for two weeks; they were less 'academic' and the syllabus for the unemployed students consisted primarily of practical subjects - skills and handicrafts, carpentry, horticulture, poultry-keeping (the Coleg had one hundred chickens) and physical training.

These developments were viewed sceptically by some education-  
alists sympathetic to the Coleg, who feared a shift away from the basic educational philosophy of Coleg Harlech. Tom Jones and the Warden were sensitive to these fears and, in 1935, the Warden reported that:



... in making these new provisions we have been concerned that the new activities undertaken should be in the best traditions of the college in standard and dignity.

He was adamant that Harlech's cultural dimension would not be diluted, stating that, "it has become clear that we must not aim at providing narrow specialist tuition for them".<sup>62</sup>

The developments were seen critically by many on the left politically: throughout the 1930s any moves towards coercion and compulsion in the treatment of the unemployed provoked opposition and hostility. In July 1933, the Daily Herald gave front page space to a story that the Government was about to introduce an Unemployment Bill that would involve a vast scheme of "compulsory occupational training" being imposed upon those who had exhausted their benefit: various educational establishments would be used for this training, "for example, twenty are to be trained at Harlech College in North Wales".<sup>63</sup>

A little earlier, in 1932, the Daily Worker had castigated, "the sickening hypocrisy of the Social Services schemes... schemes of empty philanthropy that cover a sinister manoeuvre to split and demoralise the workers' ranks".<sup>64</sup>

In the industrial areas of Wales, this opposition to relief work was common and Tom Jones knew that the voluntary projects at Coleg Harlech would be opposed by much of the Labour movement. At the same time, the scheme for the unemployed generated money and additional resources for the college.<sup>65</sup>

### Coleg Harlech and the Trade Unions

Despite these difficulties and conflicts, the Coleg retained some connections with, and support from, the Labour movement and trade unions. During the 1930s, a number of individual unions gave



some financial assistance to Harlech students: these included the I.S.T.C., the Iron Moulder's Union, the Railway Clerk's Association, the T.G.W.U., and Lodges of the S.W.M.F.. In the autumn of 1939, the T.G.W.U. announced that as part of its new educational policy it would establish a £100 scholarship tenable at Coleg Harlech.

Over the years too, the Council of Management became more broadly representative of the Labour movement in Wales. Initiatives were taken to seek to consolidate the Coleg's support in South Wales: Archie Lush, closest friend of Aneurin Bevan, had been contacted by T.J. who used him to help organise some of the short courses for the unemployed at Harlech. In 1938, Lush helped launch an appeal for Coleg Harlech. He told T.J. that he was very anxious, "to get Coleg Harlech across to the working class movement in Wales", and he was sending "our appeal to over two thousand organisations attached to the trade unions, the Labour Party and Co-operative organisations".<sup>66</sup>

### The Contemporary Period

During the Second World War, the Coleg ceased to function as a residential adult education college but it remained an educational centre: Liverpool University used the buildings until the autumn of 1942, when the Army Bureau of Current Affairs (A.B.C.A.) moved in, and for the rest of the War, Harlech remained a centre for the training of army education officers.

Post-War it was appreciated, more than ever, that the future of the college depended upon its being accepted in South Wales.

As the process for the selection of the new Warden proceeded in early 1946, T.J. took care to consult powerful friends of the college in South Wales such as Archie Lush and Llewellyn Heycock of the all-important Glamorgan Education Authority.

The man appointed was I.D. Harry, a South Walian graduate of

the University of Wales, and Headmaster of the Garw Grammar School. Dan Harry had, however, been a long-time active member of the I.L.P.. He had been imprisoned as a conscientious objector for several years during the First World War and he had retained close links with the Welsh Labour movement. He was also a W.E.A. stalwart.

As a result of much hard work by Dan Harry and his friendship with Alf Davies, their President, the N.U.M., South Wales Area, finally agreed in 1949 to establish five scholarships (£200 each) for members to attend Harlech. Trade union support remained patchy and erratic, however, and Coleg Harlech continued to have a basis of educational support, approach and ambience somewhat different from Ruskin College. The Welsh college had a particularly strong Liberal Studies emphasis - that there had never been examinations at Harlech had once been the Coleg's proudest boast.

The 1950s, however, had been increasingly an age that called for qualifications and looked for examination successes. In the late 1950s and the early 1960s, 'A' and 'O' level G.C.E. syllabuses were taught at the Coleg, because students wishing to go on to university or higher education after Harlech invariably needed these qualifications most effectively to gain entry to higher education. This generated some real tensions and dilemmas: working class students (many coming from the W.E.A.) using the Coleg to climb the educational ladder; the pressure on them and the Coleg to devote time and energy to 'A' level G.C.E. examination achievement at the expense of the Coleg's commitment to education for social purpose. 'O' and 'A' level G.C.E. syllabuses were manifestly unsuited to the real needs and demands of the Coleg Harlech students (and teaching staff) and in the late 1960s a University of Wales Diploma similar to the Ruskin College/Oxford University Diploma was introduced.



From 1968 to the mid-1970s, the 'student movement' was a political force in the country as a whole and, indeed, across a number of European countries and in the United States. In the 1970s the Coleg Harlech students had direct involvement in national organisations such as the National Union of Students and the Mature Students' Union, and there was a new pattern of protest in the Coleg itself. The college now had a more heterogeneous student population. In 1973/74, there were 123 students and of these 53 were Welsh, 56 were English and a large number of these were Londoners. This student body abolished the position of student 'President' and pressed for a different kind of relationship with the Coleg. In 1973, student representation on the Coleg Senate was established and students were also represented on the Council and the Executive. Over this period in the mid-1970s, political debate almost eclipsed every other aspect of college life. Many students thought that the changes achieved in student representation on the Coleg Governing bodies were only half-hearted concessions. A Labour movement college for working class students should go further with changes in syllabus, teaching and general direction. Examinations were boycotted at Christmas in 1974, and there was further trouble in 1976 when some students reacted to a large increase in fees by the D.E.S. by inaugurating a rent strike which led to suspensions and a student occupation of vacant rooms. Relationships between staff and the students at the college were obviously exceptionally tense through this period, but the Coleg survived and entered the 1980s to face the changed challenges of recession, public expenditure cuts and mass unemployment.

Commenting on the difficulties in the Coleg in the mid-1970s, Peter Stead says:

During the 1975 student unrest and educational difficulties between



students and the Principal had led to the closure of Fircroft College, the adult college which most closely resembled Harlech, and everyone in adult education was well aware of the consequences of a mishandled situation.<sup>67</sup>

## CHAPTER TWO

### IV...FIRCROFT COLLEGE

Fircroft is an older college than Coleg Harlech. The idea for the foundation of Fircroft was conceived at a meeting of the National Council of the Adult Schools Union at Scarborough in 1908. George Cadbury Junior took the initiative and gave the Cadbury's financial support which enabled the college to open early in 1909. He wrote in the Bourneville Works Magazine in January of that year, stating that the object of the college would be to help the students, "return to their work, dignify it and to help their comrades... to raise their class".<sup>68</sup>

It is clear from accounts of the history of the college that the first Warden set his stamp upon the character of the new college and helped mould the institution to capture the "strange mixture of radical, reforming zeal and evangelical spirit"<sup>69</sup> which its Quaker founders wished to transmit.

Tom Bryan was chosen as Warden in 1908 by members of the Woodbrooke Council and the N.A.S.U. and the W.E.A.. One of nine children whose father was a prison warder, he attended a Board School, after which he became a counterman in a hosiery warehouse. Under his parents' evangelical influence the young Tom was preaching at seventeen and through the Church and his membership of a Speech Club for Young Men he developed his interests in religion and working class conditions. At the age of 23, in 1888, he passed the examination to enter Bradford Theological College. He went on to Glasgow University, then moved back to college at Bradford to train for the Congregational Ministry. In Bradford and Glasgow he came into contact with Labour movement activities and members of the newly formed I.L.P..

He worked at a Settlement in London (Walworth) in the late 1890s and he became one of the first Labour Mayors when in 1902 he was Mayor of Southwark. It has been said that his prophet was not Marx but Mazzini. He became a Quaker and served on the Council of the Adult School Union, visiting Denmark in 1904 and 1905 where he had first-hand experience of the Danish Folk High School tradition and philosophy.

With this background and experience, Tom Bryan fostered a Fircroft which promoted education for "life rather than livelihood", strong on open discussion ("teaching is not lecturing"), with morning readings but with a regime which was deliberately spartan to avoid the dangers of students and staff aspiring to middle class standards.<sup>70</sup>

Like Harlech, Fircroft College welcomed individual trade union students but it did not have such close institutional support from the unions as did Ruskin. The emphasis was upon liberal adult education and against examinations or vocational studies, though in addition to academic subjects, gardening was included in the early years.

Thus established, the college survived three migrations to new premises, all the fluctuations and changes in adult education; the shifts of emphasis which new staff may bring (the second Warden, Harvey, lectured on the Growth of Poetry, Art and Daily Life, and the Hebrew Prophets); the often conflicting demands of students, philanthropic patrons and Government. There were, of course, problems, criticisms, personality clashes, heart-searchings and direct clashes over the direction the college was taking students or not taking them.

#### 'Back to Work' or 'Getting On'?

As with the other long-term colleges, Fircroft experienced a fundamental change over the decades in the post-college careers of students. A member of staff at Ruskin in 1908 could claim:



The measure of the success of Ruskin College may be gauged from the fact that not a single working man who has passed through the college has failed to return to his trade".<sup>71</sup>

All the colleges measured their success in the early years to some degree by the number of students who returned from whence they came. In 1912, Fircroft had had 90 full-time students of whom 59 had returned to their former employment and in 1914 the Old Fircrofter reported that a "majority were continuing their former work after leaving Fircroft".<sup>72</sup>

The Hillcroft prospectus of 1922 proclaimed that the college "is not an avenue to a better post or an opportunity for 'getting on'".<sup>73</sup>

A survey of Coleg Harlech student 'careers' based on the college's student in-take from 1927 to 1939 revealed that only 10% went on to further study and the same percentage changed occupations.<sup>74</sup>

Steadily, however, more students did move on and change their jobs. It was said that by 1939 most of the men attending Fircroft did so with the idea of a change of job in mind. Certainly in the post-Second World War period a majority of students from the adult colleges did not return to their jobs - they moved on to study in higher education institutions and/or took other employment. Nevertheless, a substantial number of former Fircroft students subsequently worked in occupations consistent with the founders' aims and objectives in the sense that they were employed within the Labour and trade union movement, education or the social services.

The third Fircroft Warden re-affirmed the view that the residential colleges had as a key objective the "pursuit of truth for the sake of a better ordering of the 'great society'".<sup>75</sup> That idealism and commitment expressed the W.E.A. 'social purpose' philosophy in adult education. The differences of view about that purpose and objective became particularly intense, and burst into

bitter dispute, at Fircroft in the mid-1970s.

### The Fircroft Dispute

A brief summary of what happened from the Spring of 1975 gives an immediate impression of the scale and the significance of the Fircroft crisis.

In March 1975, the students at Fircroft decided to boycott classes. A dispute between the Principal, the tutors and the students widened to involve the Governors, the Birmingham Trades Council, and trade unions generally. Unresolved conflict led to a student occupation of the college, D.E.S. involvement, a lobby of M.P.s at Westminster, the appointment of a Committee of Inquiry whose report was published by H.M.S.O.. This recommended that the Principal and the tutors be dismissed. The four tutors contested their dismissal at an Industrial Tribunal but they lost their jobs. The college was closed and it re-opened some years later with a new Principal and new staff.

It is quite clear from accounts of this dispute that ideological differences central to our thesis were at the heart of the matter and a number of key people involved had long-standing connections with the W.E.A.. The Committee of Inquiry Report ('The Leggatt Report') and a booklet of Papers Provoked by the Fircroft College Dispute (published by the Society of Industrial Tutors in 1977) offer, when taken together, a wide range of perceptions and comments upon the issue from which a clearer picture of the college crisis can be drawn.<sup>76</sup>

There was, of course, a background and a history relevant to the events which began in March 1975. A.J. Corfield was appointed Principal at Fircroft in the Spring of 1971. His predecessor, Hopkins, had "done the job with conspicuous success and acclaim".<sup>77</sup>

Prior to his appointment, Corfield was Director of the W.E.A.'s Service Centre for Social Studies, and as a National Officer he had edited W.E.A. News. Before that he had spent some years as Secretary of the Education and Research Department of the T.G.W.U. and he had written the official history of the W.E.T.U.C. (Epoch in Workers' Education, W.E.A., 1969).

The Senior Tutor at the time of the dispute was Harry Newton. He had been appointed, as Tutor, in 1970, before which he had been a W.E.A. Tutor organiser in the Yorkshire North District for some years. Shortly after Corfield's appointment all the Fircroft tutors had left (with the exception of Newton) not because of Corfield, but all had strong criticisms of his suitability as Principal.

The new tutors also became critical. In 1974, there were strong disagreements between Corfield and the staff over the employment of Corfield's wife to teach English courses; over the approach to English, and over Corfield's lack of consultation with them on these and other college issues. In January 1975, there were rows between Newton and the Principal and another tutor (Milson) and the Principal.

On March 10th 1975, the Principal chaired a meeting of staff and students, discussing the educational policy of the college. During a discussion about student papers one of the tutors asked if he might speak. Corfield refused. Pressure from the students to allow teaching staff to speak freely led to the meeting being adjourned. After which there was another row between the Principal and the tutors. Newton construed the Principal's comments as a threat to procure his dismissal and said he would tell the students this. The Principal then decided to cancel the education policy meeting. With this knowledge the students convened an emergency meeting of the Students' Union and decided to take strike action. The Executive Committee of the Union demanded that the education meeting should be re-convened.



The Principal agreed, but with the rider that personal matters be excluded. The students Executive Committee rejected this. The same week, the Principal attended a joint meeting but the dispute was not resolved. At a Students' Union meeting on Monday 17th March a resolution was passed stating that the Principal was:

...either unwilling or incapable of running the College to the satisfaction of the teaching staff and students and therefore is excluded from participating in any further educational activity in the college.<sup>78</sup>

It was also decided at the same meeting, which became an 'education meeting' lasting two days, that the students would organise their own educational programme. The main points of the new programme, approved by voting, were published in a document, 'Student Control':

- i) all future educational activity in the college should be voluntary;
- ii) the practice of taking registers at lectures, seminars etc., should be discarded;
- iii) the former rigid timetable should be replaced by a flexible structure subject to scrutiny at a weekly plenary session...
- iv) the subjects for lectures and study would be extended to include Marxist Theory and Irish Labour History.

The Spring Term ended. Before the beginning of the Summer Term all students were sent a letter from the Governors, with a Memorandum from the Chairman. These included a general re-statement of the aims of Fircroft: liberal education, discovering the students' potential, providing the community with new 'grass roots' leaders... But re-affirming that the Governing Body controls major policies and the direct responsibility of the Principal to the Governing Body. The students were reminded that three years ago two staff and two student representatives joined the Governing Body and that a special seminar

had been planned for later 1975 with students in residence from over the past fifteen years offering views and comment for future developments.

When the new term began, the Secretary of the Fircroft Trust, Albert Gregg wrote to the students proposing a new Education Committee for the college. This was rejected by the students because the Principal was included as a member of the Committee. The D.E.S. suggested to the Governors that they set up an independent inquiry, but they did not. On several occasions small groups of Governors met representatives of the students but they found them, "intransigent and offensive".<sup>79</sup> The students occupied the Bursar's Office. They held an 'Open Day' to publicise the new 'Student Control' educational programme.

On the 11th June, the Governors told the tutors they were going to close the college. They later retracted this to allow conciliation to take place. A press statement was issued by Christopher Cadbury, the Chairman of the Trust, on the 12th June stating that the Trust had been forced to consider the temporary closure of the college: the authority of the Principal had been challenged, there was disorder in the college and they could not make decisions under the present pressures. At the same time, the students launched their 'Save Fircroft Campaign' with the support of the tutors. They claimed that the student-controlled education programme put into effect in the last days of the Spring Term continued to operate satisfactorily to the dismay of the Trustees. They called for the resignation of the Chairman of the Trustees and for a public inquiry into the dispute. Harry Newton, as A.S.T.M.S. delegate to the Birmingham Trades Council called on the Council to resist the encroachments being made upon academic freedom by Fircroft's Principal and to reject, "paternalistic Cadburyland".<sup>80</sup> A motion supporting the 'Save Fircroft Campaign' was carried.



A protest meeting was held and a march in support of the Campaign. The students took possession of the college. Term ended with the students' final position stated in a letter to Christopher Cadbury, Chairman of the Trust, on the 2nd July: that Fircroft should remain open to men and women; that the Principal should resign and that there should be a public inquiry. On the 3rd July, the Governors decided to close the college and they supported the call for an independent inquiry. The Committee of Inquiry was appointed in September 1975 to:

... inquire into the problems in the conduct of Fircroft College, the relationship and the responsibilities of the Fircroft Trust, the Governing Body, the Principal, the staff and the students.<sup>81</sup>

#### 'The Leggatt Report' <sup>82</sup>

The Report concluded that, "each side in the dispute might well have been speaking a different language". (p.8). The Committee noted that only one person (a student) expressed to them the feeling that, "everyone concerned with Fircroft last year must accept some of the blame for what happened there - we agree with him." The Committee criticised all parties and especially the students. The Report's comment on the strike included the observation, "strictly speaking students have no labour to withdraw, they can only boycott". The students' demands were, "in form often outrageous, in substance, impossible to accede to". (p.9). "A politically motivated minority seized the opportunity to practise workers' control", and "the language in which their 'demands' was couched was absurdly intemperate and uncondusive to rational dialogue". (p. 10).

The tutors, "acquiesced in the students' behaviour" and the Report criticised them for, "mud-slinging". (p.8). The tutors had "accused the Principal of being party-politically motivated" but the Committee found no real evidence of this (p. 12). "It is the tragedy of all four tutors that although they were devoted to Fircroft and to



the students, they nevertheless entered the arena and allowed the dust of battle to cloud their vision". (p. 12).

The Principal was a "lonely man, weak and infirm of purpose... when respect goes, all authority goes... he was the wrong man for the job". (p. 11). The Governors, "were not equipped to deal with the situation..." (seven out of the twelve had W.E.A. connections - A. Gregg, the Secretary of the Trust, had been Chairman and Secretary of a W.E.A. branch from 1945-1955). Even the D.E.S. and the Inspectorate were gently rebuked. These, "Officers should have taken further steps to inform themselves..." (p. 13).

The Report recommended: the dismissal of the Principal and the tutors; that the college re-open in 1976, and "in accord with the traditions of adult education, students should be afforded a maximum of participation in the educational programme, but not control..." (p. 14); and that when the college re-opened, men and women be accepted for one-year courses.

#### The reaction to the 'Leggatt Report' and a later development

Not everybody accepted that the 'Leggatt Report' offered a balanced and objective view of the Fircroft dispute. Elizabeth Kingdom criticised the Report in her paper for the Society of Industrial Tutors for its bias towards the Governors and the Principal, and against the tutors and the students.<sup>83</sup> It is quite clear that the Principal and the Governors were not too pleased with the Report either. In the event it is worth noting that the Report's recommendations were broadly accepted and that these included several of the students' 'demands': the inquiry itself; the removal of the college Principal and the re-opening of the college to men and women.

It has been argued that the students, at the outset, were only asking for the received wisdom in workers' education and that this

'received wisdom' can put tutors into a vulnerable position:

If well taught, "The student moves from the uncritical acceptance of orthodoxy to creative dissent over the values and standards of society... as his intellect is stretched and his critical faculty sharpened... We need to recognise that the processes of education which involve teachers or agents of some kind are in effect acts of aggression on the minds and personalities of others." (Kenneth Lawson).<sup>84</sup>

If that was relevant at the outset, the issue quickly developed and involved other issues.

Frank Burchill gave his reflections as a former tutor in his paper and he argued the necessity to appreciate the significance of residence and the ideology of community which had grown in the residential colleges: the 'morning readings'; the traditions of 'squad and gardening'; College rules; remaining in residence at week-ends.:

Some form of management is needed... We live in a political world which hasn't yet provided the mechanism whereby a group of people can do their own thing, using State finance, under the designation, 'education'. If we wish to reject the notion of a college life Fircroft because such restraints exist then those of us employed by educational institutions are being hypocritical.<sup>85</sup>

At the same S.I.T. Conference, one of the tutors involved in the dispute claimed they were not 'trying to do their own thing':

We weren't revolutionaries or radicals - we merely took traditional liberal values seriously... In the final analysis the dispute revealed the basic tensions of education.<sup>86</sup>

If that were so, then why did Fircroft experience such a bitter dispute when these basic tensions were present at other colleges like Coleg Harlech? The Report and the views of tutors and students



do concur in placing the personality clashes between the Principal and the tutors and students as a major factor. Dave Goodman, contributing to the S.I.T. discussion as a former Fircroft student, said that Corfield's predecessor, Hopkins, had:

... insisted he was in control. Some opposed him and others used him to fight their personal battles. But before he left his control was breaking down and it became more difficult for him... Corfield, when he took over, increased the proportion of students with a trade union background and emphasised the importance of students returning to the community. As the cultural background of Fircroft's student body changed, there was a need for a new style of leadership from the Principal and tutors.<sup>87</sup>

#### Fircroft and the MI5 connection

There is one bizarre feature about the Fircroft dispute which could only subsequently, in 1985, be considered. Harry Newton, the Senior Tutor, played a critical role in the events as we have seen. The 'Leggatt Report' emphasised his importance in this way:

Because of Mr. Newton's age, experience and qualities of leadership, he had it in his power to control the course of events at Fircroft. He did not do so.<sup>88</sup>

Given the significance of what became a public affair in 1985, a little more biographical detail is needed as prologue.

Newton's father was an unemployed manual labourer. Harry was born in 1922, he left school at the minimum age but became politically active in his 'teens and joined the Communist Party just before the Second World War. He was conscripted into the army. After demobilisation he returned to the Yorkshire area to work in unskilled jobs at engineering factories and for the Communist Party. But he left the C.P. in 1957, maintaining, nevertheless, that he was a Marxist and he continued to be active in the Labour movement. He was a student at



Fircroft in 1959 and 1960, after which he took a degree in economics at Hull University. For the next seven years he was a W.E.A. Tutor organiser working from his home in Selby, and this was followed by the Fircroft appointment. The Fircroft Magazine for 1971, The Fircrofter, carried an impressive little article by Harry Newton called 'In Search of the Fircroft Tradition' where he writes of the, "fellowship of learning" and concludes that, at best, the Fircrofter:

...will have internalised whilst at Fircroft a desire for systematic study, an understanding of the needs of his community and a noble humility in the awareness of the profound mysteries of human nature.<sup>89</sup>

Sadly, after his death (he died of a heart attack in 1981). one of the more sordid mysteries of human nature became the concern of many Old Fircrofters.

In February 1985, Cathy Massiter, a former intelligence officer with MI5, contributed to a Channel 4 television documentary, produced by '20/20 Vision', about illegal MI5 surveillance techniques. The I.B.A. prevented the broadcast of the programme because it was considered to be in breach of the Official Secrets Act. Nevertheless, details of the transcript of the documentary became known in which Cathy Massiter made reference to Harry Newton as an MI5 agent and informer. She claimed he had joined MI5 in the mid-1950s because he believed that there was a Communist conspiracy. She named him as the MI5 agent who infiltrated C.N.D. in 1980 and spied on Bruce Kent, the National Secretary of C.N.D..<sup>90</sup>

These revelations provoked considerable interest and controversy. Several articles and a number of letters were published on the issue in The Guardian over several weeks to the point when a Plymouth reader wrote a very short exasperated letter, "Will you please inform everyone that I did not know Harry Newton".<sup>91</sup>

Many former colleagues and friends of Harry Newton expressed shock and disbelief, demanding evidence to substantiate the allegations, and that there be a public inquiry. E.P. Thompson's letter said:

What Harry deserves ... and what his friends, as well as those who may have been spied upon, have a right to ask for - is an immediate public inquiry to set the record straight.

He had already emphasised: "I also knew Harry Newton, off and on for thirty years, in the adult education and other movements. He was an unlikely agent". He added, though, "as an historian of such things... I know that agents are always unlikely persons".<sup>92</sup>

Newton's former colleague at Fircroft, Trevor Blackwell, contributed an article deploring an ideological climate and political structures which sanctioned 'spying'. The article was headlined: 'Whatever Harry's Game Was, Trust Is The Loser', and Blackwell referred back to the Fircroft dispute.<sup>93</sup> The former Fircroft Principal, Tony Corfield, was quoted in another Guardian article, when a journalist talked to friends and colleagues of the dead man:

Neither I nor the Governors were in any doubt that Harry Newton was the dominating force in the dispute.

He acknowledged the respect for Harry's reputation held by a wide range of people in the Labour movement:

The question mark over his integrity is bound to shock them as it does me. The suggestion that he was following instructions to make trouble in the college, I find it hard to believe, and I equally find it hard to believe that he was an MI5 informer.

But the fact is that the college was closed down."

Ken Coates, founder of the Institute of Workers' Control (also an adult education tutor) was quoted in the same article:

I don't understand... why the agent in question (Massiter) should invent such a story. If it is true, it would mean that what happened at Fircroft might well have been a provocation".<sup>94</sup>



Further evidence was not forthcoming and there was no public inquiry. Thus, the truth about all this will probably now be never known or knowable. But, if an MI5 agent were in Fircroft, paid to report or provoke (the distinction is important - and how ironic if the agent were only paid for the former) then that is arguably some kind of tribute to the importance attached to adult education in an unlikely Department of Governments otherwise too preoccupied to show serious interest in liberal adult education.

#### Long-term or short-term courses?

The debate about the Fircroft conflict and closure drew attention to the relevance of assessing the advantages and the disadvantages of long-term and short-term courses and colleges. Terry Murphy had argued at the Society of Industrial Tutors' Conference that Tony Corfield's 'style' as Principal was wrong for a long-term residential college... and saw:

... the almost inevitable emergence of problems when Corfield's experience (short courses) ... confronted a long residential course. and he claimed that strong pressures had been exerted, "to shift (Fircroft) over to short courses and day release courses".<sup>95</sup>

Andrew Burchardt in his S.I.T. paper, 'Short-Term or Long-Term Courses' insisted on the value of both types of course and the associated institutions.<sup>96</sup> And H.D. Hughes, speaking at the S.I.T. Conference with all the authority of his years as Principal of Ruskin College, and as President of the W.E.A., took up the same theme at the Conference. Whilst stressing the gains which may be achieved from Ruskin and the long-term colleges, he added:

... there is a price for leaving one's roots... What is needed is a network of short-term residential colleges serving social activists".<sup>97</sup>



Although most of the short-term colleges have different origins and do not share the same educational aims and objectives as the long-term colleges there is, as we have noted, some overlapping and interplay between the two types of college. The short-term colleges have had their own connected conflicts and difficulties of which we will consider three.

## CHAPTER TWO

### V. The Wedgwood Memorial College - Oxford and the W.E.A. North Staffordshire District.

In the late 1940s, the Wedgwood Memorial College was at the centre of a bitter controversy which involved Oxford University and the W.E.A.. This affair has very close affinities with the political conflicts in the long-term colleges: accusations that the politically committed threatened academic neutrality with counter-accusations that the winds of the 'cold war' created a witch-hunting atmosphere.

A careful and very detailed history of this whole issue has been written by Roger Fieldhouse in his doctoral thesis, and published in his book, Adult Education and the Cold War. My account here is based very largely upon his research.

The W.E.A. had been a strong force in North Staffordshire since Tawney held his first Tutorial Class in Longton, and when the North Staffordshire Miners' Higher Education Movement had flourished in the early years of the century.

After the Second World War there was a very rapid expansion of the Oxford Extra-Mural Delegacy which then covered a very large area of England, including the North Staffordshire District. In 1946, the Delegacy appointed seven new full time tutors and most of these were allocated to the North Staffs. District, bringing the total in the area to twelve.

The Secretary of the Delegacy in the post-War period was T.L. Hodgkin, a member of the Communist Party, and a number of the full time tutors in the Delegacy were left wing and several were also members of the Communist Party, including the first Warden of the Wedgwood Memorial College, John Vickers.

There was nothing particularly significant or sinister in this because in the mid-1940s there was a general leftward shift in political attitudes leading not just to the 1945 Labour Government but also to an ideological climate which was less implacably hostile to communism:

... it didn't seem to matter... whether a tutor was a communist or not. It was a real united front atmosphere... There was this feeling in 1945 that the sky's the limit. We can all go ahead together.<sup>99</sup>

Nevertheless, leading members of the adult education movement in Oxford and the W.E.A. were suspicious of Marxist ideology and communism even before the end of the War. A.D. Lindsay, who chaired the Oxford Delegacy and who was, of course, a major national figure in education, strongly held the view that communism denied the essential freedoms of democracy and, therefore, had an ambivalent attitude towards communists in education. He had been a member of the committee which appointed Hodgkin, though he did not know of Hodgkin's Communist Party connections at the time. The Delegacy had been aware for some years about what was regarded as an exuberant pro-Sovietism of one of its tutors, A.T. D'Eye, and reports had been given to the Tutorial Classes Committee on his classes in 1943. A complaint from the Delegacy's senior tutor in Kent went before the Tutorial Classes Committee in 1946 against a recently appointed tutor, J.A. McClean, who was a member of the Communist Party, about political bias in his teaching. Relationships were strained but the complaints went no further.

The W.E.A. General Secretary during the period, Ernest Green, was a zealous defender of W.E.A./trade union relationships but he was hostile to the N.C.L.C. and intolerant of Marxist, communist or left wing movements and views. Thus, the presence of Hodgkin in the key position of Secretary to the Delegacy from June 1945, with a rapidly expanding team of Oxford tutors working for the W.E.A., offered



potential for ideological tensions as the 'cold war' polarized and made more frigid the political positions.

As the popular front atmosphere changed so the feeling began to grow that the Oxford Delegacy had a disproportionate number of left wing or communist tutors. In so far as many of the left wing tutors were concentrated in North Staffordshire this was a particular cause for concern. R.B. Cant remembers that in North Staffordshire over a long period of time, the 'social democrats' were always out-voted eight to six. In the Delegacy as a whole, Frank Pickstock, "used to reckon that of our thirty-one tutors, there were fourteen or fifteen who were fellow-travellers or card-carrying communists".<sup>100</sup>

After 1945, at least five members of the Delegacy's full time staff were members of the Communist Party and four of these worked in North Staffs.. Ron Bellamy who spent two years in a post shared between Christ Church, Oxford and the Delegacy before moving to Leeds in 1948; Henry Collins, also appointed soon after the War, had joined the Communist Party in the late 1930s and remained a member until the late 1950s, lived in Barlaston for a brief period. John Vickers was appointed Warden of the Wedgwood Memorial College in 1946 after a War-time experience as prisoner-of-war in Germany and one year's part-time tutoring. He was a member of the C.P. until he resigned in 1956. Hodgkin had joined the C.P. before the War and had been appointed Staff Tutor in North Staffs. in September 1939, and continued to have close contacts and teach in North Staffs. after his appointment as Secretary in 1945 until he resigned in 1952.

Other members of the Delegacy who worked in North Staffs. for at least some of the time during the post-War period were sufficiently left wing or sympathetic to the C.P. and its members to be called, 'fellow-travellers'. Bridget Sutton, appointed as a probationary tutor in 1945 and as a Staff Tutor in 1946. Stephen Coltham felt

firmly committed to the popular front and he regarded the C.P. as one part of the broad front. Raymond Williams became a Staff Tutor in 1946. He had joined the C.P. in Cambridge in 1939 but he remained a member for only two years. In the post-War period working for the Delegacy he was a known socialist and radical and to people outside left wing circles he still appeared to be a communist or 'fellow-traveller' - "not a member of the Party, but still a communist".<sup>101</sup> The Revd. J.W. Campbell, who was appointed in North Staffs. at the same time as Bridget Sutton, to stimulate an interest in popular adult education in working men's clubs, was reputedly a Trotskyist. As such he was distrusted by some of the communists but the distinction - as with Williams and others - was not so apparent to people not on the left.

Thus, by 1947 nine out of thirty full time teaching staff plus the Secretary of the Delegacy were either members of the Communist Party or were perceived as 'fellow travellers', and most of these were concentrated in North Staffordshire and teaching or organising at some time or other in Wedgwood Memorial College.

Thomas Hodgkin, as Secretary of the Delegacy, played - in his own words - "a considerable part" when these new staff appointments were made, "and they were, on the whole, very good appointments. This was a period when you got the most exciting people coming in".<sup>102</sup>

It would, in any case, be fairly obvious to others that the Secretary of the Delegacy was a key figure in a position to influence developments in adult education, including staff appointments. But did this constitute something more sinister - using adult education for propaganda purposes; putting one's political ideals and commitments before education?

Thomas Hodgkin emphatically denied that he and his Communist Party colleagues in adult education regarded it as their job to turn



people into Marxists:

People had to find their own way to Marxism... One believed that if one taught honestly and seriously and raised basic and serious problems in whatever one was teaching, people would find their own way to Marxism. It was not one's function to indoctrinate people.. No person whose primary interest is in education ever thinks his primary job is to make anyone into anything.<sup>103</sup>

More specifically, on the issue of the selection of staff, Hodgkin believed that when judging a candidate's political as opposed to academic quality it was his or her general political understanding rather than party-political allegiance which was taken into consideration:

One was interested in their political position, how they taught; how they felt; how they looked at problems. But whether they were Party members or not was not a question one would normally ask a person... In any case, one would never appoint someone because he was a Party member... There were some people whom one appointed who were totally unconnected with Marxism or communism who turned out very well... One did want people who were prepared to devote themselves to this kind of work in a disinterested kind of way and who did see adult education as playing some significant part in the efforts to build up a more humane society.<sup>104</sup>

Nevertheless, by 1947 there was a growing groundswell of complaints about the political bias of certain of Oxford's tutors, particularly those teaching at the Wedgwood Memorial College and elsewhere in North Staffordshire. This dissatisfaction stemmed partly from the erosion of the attitudes of the popular front under the influence of the international 'cold war' polarisation, and the linked local increasingly anti-communist attitudes of some tutors such as R.H. Jones who moved to North Staffs. in 1946 and Bob Cant who had been appointed



in 1945.

In May 1947, Jones wrote to H.P. Smith, Secretary of the Tutorial Classes Committee, complaining about the 'cliquishness' of some of the North Staffs. tutors suggesting that the students resented this attitude. Ernest Green, the W.E.A. General Secretary, probably heard about this 'communist threat' as he was certainly receiving similar warnings from various quarters and sources, including the Secretary of the Danish W.E.A. who visited North Staffs. at the time, and from trade union regional officials and the T.U.C. General Council after the Trade Union School at Queens College, Oxford in April 1948, which it was alleged was communist dominated.

Green decided to take action to prevent what he saw as the harmful effects of the Marxist tutors' activities. Green was deeply suspicious of Hodgkin's role, as is apparent in a letter he wrote to Tawney in October 1947, doubting whether Hodgkin was a suitable person to invite to a meeting of a few sympathetic university and W.E.A. people to discuss problematic relations between the universities and the W.E.A.:

I am doubtful about Hodgkin. I do not think he is reliable and I have some evidence that he is playing a double game... (But) on second thoughts I would include Hodgkin as he may be more dangerous outside than inside.<sup>105</sup>

Some months later, the W.E.A. National Executive Committee delayed the North Staffs. District from appointing a successor to Gladys Malbon as District Secretary and reserved the right to invite applicants and interview suitable candidates. There had been a long-running battle between the North Staffs. District and the Central Office of the W.E.A. since 1937. Green and the Executive Committee were now trying to ensure the appointment of someone more controllable than Wigg and more trustworthy than Gladys Malbon. Cecil Scrimgeour was acting

temporarily as District Secretary but Green wanted a new appointment (and his own man in post) as soon as possible, but Tawney persuaded Green to sanction existing temporary arrangements.

In the Spring of 1948, Green sought a meeting regarding difficulties at the Wedgwood Memorial College but it was apparently not possible to find a mutually convenient date with Scrimgeour and Vickers. Green was seeking a showdown. At the beginning of June, the Executive Committee decided to cut off grant-aid received from the W.E.T.U.C. for trade union education courses at the Wedgwood Memorial College for the next year's session (1948/49).

At the meeting of the Oxford Tutorial Classes Committee on 5th June 1948 he made the critical statement and proposal:

... he had reason to believe that allegations were being made in various quarters concerning the Delegacy's employees, in particular that some of those holding teaching appointments were engaging in communist propaganda in connection with their teaching. He asked that a private investigation be made into these allegations and undertook to collect material illustrative of them... The written allegations... came from twelve persons (who) occupy responsible positions in adult education or the trade union movement.<sup>106</sup>

The allegations related to certain trade union conferences and courses held in Oxford and courses at the Wedgwood Memorial College.

The Committee accepted the proposal and a special sub-committee was appointed to consider the allegations. The members of the sub-committee were: John Lowe, the Vice-Chancellor; Sir Henry Clay, Warden of Nuffield College; A.D. Lindsay; G.D.H. Cole; and Lucy Sutherland. That such an exceptionally distinguished sub-committee was appointed indicates the seriousness of the issues which were deemed to be involved. Eight meetings were held and the committee presented its report to a meeting of the Tutorial Classes Committee



in March 1949. In general, the Committee found the allegations, "for the most part somewhat imprecise".<sup>107</sup> The Committee eliminated any allegations which assumed ipso facto that communists were not fit to be tutors or that a communist point of view should not be put forward or discussed at conferences or courses organised to examine contemporary problems. The Committee considered such assumptions an unwarranted restriction upon the freedom of academic discussion. Green challenged this view at the T.C.C. meeting but it was upheld.

Before considering the Committee's more specific findings on issues related to the Wedgwood Memorial College we need to look in more detail at what took place at the college from its foundation to 1948-49.

#### The Wedgwood Memorial College affair

During the War the North Staffordshire Adult Education Committee (a joint committee of the Staffordshire, Stoke and Burton-on-Trent L.E.A.s, the W.E.A. District and the Oxford Delegacy) had begun negotiating for the lease of Barlaston Hall to create a new kind of residential adult education college. After some difficulties this was achieved and the college opened early in 1945 although the Hall was still in need of major structural alterations and the formal opening (by Sir Richard Livingstone) was delayed until 1947. The Delegacy agreed that it should provide tutorial and financial assistance to the college and appoint a Warden. When John Vickers was appointed to this post in June 1946, he was, "accountable to the Oxford T.C.C." for the academic programme and the teaching at the college and, as was then normal in the Delegacy, the appointment was made, "for a period of three years, subject to satisfactory service, and thereafter considered for renewal".<sup>108</sup>

Vickers had been at Cambridge before the War, where he had



joined the Communist Party. In 1945/46, he was a part-time tutor for the Delegacy and he supported his application for the post of Warden with good references. A testimonial from the late senior officer for the British Army at Oflag IX, where Vickers had been a prisoner of war stated that, "this officer has very definite views on Social Services and Public Welfare which he can 'put over' extremely well".<sup>109</sup>

From the start, Vickers was determined to develop the college's links with the trade unions and to make trade union education a major part of the college programme. But some of Vickers' colleagues were critical of how this was achieved. Frank Pickstock recalled that:

Vickers was a superb adult educator but ... quite clearly in terms of teaching and organising he was over-stepping the mark... (i.e.) the kind of things that were being taught; the kind of speakers he got; the kind of students he made a set at... the lefties and the Communist Party.<sup>110</sup>

The acting W.E.A. District Secretary, Cecil Scrimgeour, expressed more forthright criticism: Vickers was at that time:

... a communist fanatic (who) soon showed himself bent upon using the college teaching programme to the greatest advantage of his creed. He had a large circle of friends with communist and fellow-travelling beliefs and they figured with an undue prominence among those who were invited to the college to lecture on the current range of social and political topics. (It was this imbalance which started Ernest Green's suspicious inquiries)... the cherished ideal of an open educational movement came under very positive threat from a group of tutors and members who sought, in private conclave and in other ways, to manage that movement (through the classes) for their own purposes.<sup>111</sup>

Vickers, Collins and Bridget Sutton all lived in Barlaston for some time in the late 1940s; they would meet together frequently, they shared political beliefs and therefore gave the appearance of being a close-knit political group. This apparent cliquishness caused some disquiet even among their colleagues of similar political persuasion. Thomas Hodgkin wrote a letter to H.P. Smith in the Delegacy<sup>2</sup> complaining:

I didn't think we had agreed that J.V., Collins and Bridget Sutton should all function at this A.E.U. School at the same time. But we have learned that J.V. is uncontrollable in such matters anyway.<sup>112</sup>

The college programme for the period when Vickers was Warden included a growing number of day and weekend schools, linked weekend courses and summer schools for trade unionists. But there was also a wide variety of more general cultural courses for the general public and provision for various other 'special groups', including W.E.A. branches, youth clubs, army officers, secondary modern school children, and emergency trained teachers. By 1948/49, approximately one quarter of the weekend schools were for trade unionists. (In July 1948, the Warden reported to the North Staffs. Adult Education Committee that 513 out of 1000 students attending weekend schools were industrial workers, chiefly miners).

Did the activities of Vickers and his colleagues amount to a communist conspiracy? Roger Fieldhouse, having examined the records and the relevant files concludes, "One thing is certain, there was no inkling of this before Green made his allegations in June 1948".<sup>113</sup> The Ministry of Education was totally unaware of any problem - its files on the college for this period are solely concerned about the arrangements for renovating Barlaston Hall. Nor are there any foreboding reports in the Delegacy's files: a report of a visit by



Frank Pickstock (who was as we have seen very critical of communists) to a trade union weekend course in December 1947 is somewhat critical of the standard of discussion by the students, but he says nothing at all about any political bias by the tutors, who included Vickers, Bellamy and Collins. A representative of the Tutors' Association, the A.T.A.E., who was sent to Barlaston after the trouble had broken visited a couple of classes taught by 'politically aligned' tutors, one of whom was John Vickers, but found nothing untoward.

What then did the special sub-committee appointed by the Tutorial Classes Committee make of all this - what were their findings and recommendations?

The Committee gave consideration to two aspects of the W.E.A. General Secretary's allegations (insofar as these related to the Wedgwood Memorial College):

- (a) any cases in which tutors might be accused of advancing party propaganda, either directly in classes or schools or by showing a warmth of partisanship on semi-official occasions (e.g. at conferences or schools where they were not taking tutorial responsibility, or at W.E.A. meetings) which "might be thought to have endangered the confidence of their pupils in their capacity to adopt an impartial attitude in their formal teaching";<sup>114</sup>
- (b) instances at conferences or schools, planned to discuss contemporary issues, where undue prominence had been given to the representation of the communist viewpoint, to the exclusion of adequate representation of other points of view more widely held throughout the community.

With regard to (a) the Committee did not consider there was any evidence to show that any tutor had turned his or her classes into instruments of party propaganda but they did feel that on some semi-official occasions, a few tutors may "have displayed a warmth which was not discreet".<sup>115</sup> When the report was presented to the



T.C.C. the prefix 'semi' was removed from before the word 'official' thus strengthening this criticism. The officers of the Delegacy were mildly rebuked for not having given the inexperienced tutors appointed with the expansion during and after the War as much guidance in this respect as they needed. The Committee believed that, as a precautionary measure at a time when political feelings were running high, it would have been wise for the Delegacy to draw the attention of its tutors to the dangers of displaying indiscreet warmth.

But it was in relation to (b) that the Committee was more specifically critical of the trade union courses at the college:

In these courses a very large proportion of the tutors and lecturers have been persons known to be in sympathy with the Communist Party. The evidence before the Committee does not, in their opinion, support the suggestion that intentional partiality was shown in the teaching provided at these courses - indeed, they have reliable testimony to the contrary - but they believe that when highly controversial contemporary problems are under discussion a body of teachers drawn from a narrow range of political opinion is unlikely to present an adequate and comprehensive picture of the issues involved. Nor do they consider that, under present world conditions, courses so organised are likely to inspire the leaders of the trade unions with confidence in the impartiality of the instruction provided by the Delegacy. The Warden of Wedgwood Memorial College, who holds a highly responsible position, is rightly given much latitude in the planning of the courses held in the college. They consider that the curriculum at the college has been in the main well planned and they regret to have to criticise the teaching arrangements for the Trade Union Courses. They are aware that it must often be difficult to find a competent

and well-balanced team of tutors and lecturers to cover these courses but even when every allowance has been made, the Committee consider that an error in judgement has been committed for which the Warden must bear a considerable degree of responsibility in not taking care to balance the disproportionate element among tutors (and to a lesser degree, lecturers) representing one standpoint by bringing in more representation of other points of view.<sup>116</sup>

The sub-committee report was accepted by the T.C.C. on 5th March 1949 and the teaching staff sub-committee subsequently decided, in consultation with the North Staffs. Committee, not to renew Vickers' appointment at the end of his three-year term in August. This was reported to the T.C.C. in May 1949 which acceded, although it granted him an extra three months' salary.

Vickers refuted any imbalance in the selection of tutors and stated that he would refuse:

... to impose political tests on my full time colleagues, or to be guided in the choice of tutors by any other consideration than teaching ability, integrity and knowledge of the subject on the one hand and student demand on the other.<sup>117</sup>

He argued that the qualities required for teaching short-term residential courses for trade unionists were highly specialised and that it was his task as Warden to select the most suitable tutors for the job. Vickers succeeded in obtaining support for his position from the North Staffs. and Newcastle Trades Council, the Leek Trades and Labour Club, the Pottery Workers' Union, the North Staffs. District of the A.E.U., and the Club and Institute Union. Thus, a wave of protest culminated in a "stormy and unusually well attended and crowded meeting" at the W.E.A. North Staffs. District A.G.M. in the summer of 1949.<sup>118</sup> However, Thomas Hodgkin and H.P. Smith joined with Cecil Scrimgeour and others who had been critical of Vickers to



counter these protests against the decision of the T.C.C. and to placate the fears of their W.E.A. and L.E.A. partners on the North Staffs. Committee for Adult Education. The W.E.A. North Staffs. District A.G.M. therefore endorsed by a very large majority the verdict and the decision taken by the T.C.C..

The other major staff casualty, besides Vickers, was J.W. Campbell who was informed in February 1949 (two weeks before the Committee's report was presented to the T.C.C.) that his contract would not be renewed in the Autumn. The grounds were that he lacked adequate academic qualifications (he had an American B.A. and B.D. and post-graduate experience at London - which had been good enough three years previously); that his teaching was not up to university standard and that "there was incompatibility of temperament".<sup>119</sup>

In the Delegacy as a whole and in the W.E.A. North Staffs. District a very different political atmosphere prevailed after the Spring of 1949. Frank Pickstock became the Secretary of the T.C.C. and, in his own words, "was then in complete control".<sup>120</sup> Pickstock, Bob Cant and D.J. Wenden (who was appointed Staff Tutor in 1948, nominated by Pickstock to take temporary charge of Wedgwood Memorial College for a year after Vickers' departure) formed what Pickstock described as "a social democratic opposition".<sup>121</sup>

Frank Pickstock and Thomas Hodgkin agree that there followed a deepening 'cold war' polarisation: Pickstock, "It was the 'cold war atmosphere... no doubt about that..."; Hodgkin, "One was conscious of this cold wind blowing through the Delegacy but it was blowing through the world at the same time." The Barlaston affair left a legacy of bitterness and a difficult atmosphere and Hodgkin believed it then became increasingly difficult for left wing people to be appointed as tutors.<sup>122</sup> By the Autumn of 1949, he was giving serious thought to resigning (as some colleagues thought he should



make way for someone not so embarrassingly politically committed) to concentrate on writing about Africa, although he delayed the final decision until 1952.

### Interpretation of the Wedgwood Memorial College affair

It is very clear that at the heart of this controversy was a conflict about political commitment and propaganda within educational institutions giving priority to open learning and party-political neutrality. But it is equally obvious that everybody claimed to be in favour of these educational commitments taking priority. As Roger Fieldhouse says:

There was amongst all the protagonists a shared loyalty to the adult education movement as a pluralistic movement or open forum which could accommodate a broad spectrum of opinions.<sup>123</sup>

The real difference of opinion was about what, or who, appeared to constitute a threat to this open movement. Fieldhouse asserts that the 'prosaic reality' behind the demand for an inquiry was the:

... predominantly right wing trade union officialdom in North Staffs. which regarded a serious presentation of alternatives to Government and T.U.C. policies on such contentious issues as nationalisation, the wages freeze, rearmament and the role of the trade unions, to be an unwarranted challenge to their leadership. The offence became particularly reprehensible if alternatives to official policies, learnt at the Wedgwood Memorial College, were voiced at trade union meetings or elections. Accusations of interference in the unions' domestic affairs filtered through to the T.U.C., the W.E.T.U.C. and the W.E.A..<sup>124</sup>

Ernest Green, as General Secretary of the W.E.A., was taking the initiative in response to that challenge when he demanded the inquiry.

Raymond Williams refers to this "sharp form of the cold war" in his book Politics and Letters and Fieldhouse notes this contribution.<sup>125</sup>

But a more revealing account of the conflict was given by Williams in an article he wrote for the 100th Edition of the New Left Review:

I remember an extraordinary experience during the Cold War when the institution I worked in was almost evenly divided between Communist Party members (Marxists, we would now say) and Labour Party members. For internal reasons it became very bitter, and there was both intrigue and witch-hunting. It was a curious phenomenon that at the worst moments I was the only person to whom both sides spoke: the Communists because I shared their intellectual perspectives and most of their political positions; the non-Communists - but there's the rub - because I, like almost all of them, was from a working class family and had the same tastes in food and drink and enjoyment, whereas most of the Communists (Marxists) were public school boys to whom much of our incidental behaviour was vulgar. I joined neither camp, but I remember the experience, and I remember it especially when any later generation, coming from where it will, starts using either form of the contradictory rhetoric; either, "these bloody Communist (Marxist) intellectuals" or, on the other hand, the more abstract diagnoses of vulgarism, corporatism, workerism or populism.<sup>126</sup>

Roger Fieldhouse argues more generally in his book and in his thesis that the Responsible Bodies in adult education have had to operate within the "boundaries of acceptability" or the "ideological parameters" and this put particular pressure upon left wing or Marxist tutors who were perceived to have over-stepped the threshold of liberal tolerance.<sup>127</sup> The concept of "ideological parameters" merits more detailed examination (see final chapter) but within the context of this North Staffs. conflict the argument has a straightforward validity at least in the sense that the majority and ruling political view/s can impose (through grant-aid withdrawal or political pressure) constraints upon minority and particularly revolutionary views.



E.P. Thompson, writing to his Head of Department (S.G. Raybould) in the Leeds University Extra-Mural Department during the 'cold war' period (August 1949) said:

I have (like I imagine have other communist tutors) exercised considerable discretion in my public political activities in the area where I have organisational responsibilities (more than you would expect of staff tutors of other political affiliations).<sup>128</sup> Fieldhouse quotes other communist tutors who were conscious of the need to constrain themselves in similar fashion (Lionel Munby and Ron Bellamy). Thus, we are led to assume that Vickers' weakness was that he, unlike Hodgkin for instance, did not exercise this discretion or caution.

The history of the Wedgwood Memorial College in later years during the long period of Vickers' successor, Bill Lloyd, enables us to approach the question from a different perspective which sheds some light, I think, on ideological hegemony and judgement about political indiscretions.

Bill Lloyd was, by all accounts, a highly esteemed tutor and Warden, much respected by colleagues and students alike. He was, however, in his later years as Warden an alcoholic, and his indiscretions and failings stemming from this acute problem led to difficulties for the college and for his colleagues who had to support him and to cover for him. This situation lasted for a number of years until Mr. Lloyd took early retirement. The problem was officially played down, if not ignored.<sup>129</sup>

In the manner of Samuel Butler's Erewhon we could quite plausibly - on one level - be completely neutral and weigh political indiscretions and alcoholic indiscretions on the same moral scales: (acknowledge John Vickers' obvious strengths and turn a blind eye



to any lapses which resulted from political obsessions and addictions). It may even be the case - following the Erewhon line - that in the W.E.A. and adult education generally there have been as many problems caused by alcoholism as there have been caused by political fanaticism. But, of course, a political commitment/indiscretion which threatens or appears to threaten the balance of political power will be treated more seriously than most other kinds of commitment/indiscretion however much they break the bounds of orthodoxy.

We may also speculate whether an inquiry into simple incompetence in adult teaching would not reveal that as much damage has been done to the students by the ill-prepared, the inadequately trained, the lazy, tutors as by the biased and the dogmatic tutors (taking the worst cases from the politically committed tutors).

A deep and ultimately political bias may be operating here and we edge nearer to a genuine academic neutrality if we see that possibility clearly. Even so, it is probably only common-sense to recognise that if you hold, and seek to propagate, minority views on fundamental political (or religious, social and ethical) issues you will always need to watch your step that much more than will members of the majority.

## CHAPTER TWO

### VI. Wansfell College and Burton Manor College -

#### Adult Education in the 1980s

The democratic, open and socially purposive characteristics of the liberal tradition in adult education have survived despite all the problems and turbulent troubles we have surveyed. But, from the mid-1970s onwards there has been a fresh challenge to adult education and, in particular, the liberal tradition and the social and political education priority work of the W.E.A..

The public expenditure cuts begun in the wake of the oil crisis in 1974 were accelerated with the election of the Conservative Government of 1979. The political ideology and commitment of the New Right of the 1980s (commonly referred to as 'Thatcherism') has been based upon the adoption of monetarist, laissez-faire, economic policies and a deliberate break with 'consensus' politics - seen to characterise the post-War years in Britain until 1979 - which also included fundamental legal changes imposed upon the trade unions and the striking of 'cold war' attitudes, internationally. These new political commitments combined with, and arguably contributed to, exceptionally high unemployment levels, thereby radically changing the whole social and political climate. The impact upon education was severe and not just because of tighter budgets and general economic restraints. The 'market forces' philosophy displaced and undermined the liberal concern for education as a value in itself. The Manpower Services Commission with its training remit gave a massively funded impetus to a fundamental shift, at every level, away from liberal education and towards economic 'relevance' and a 'value-for-money' utilitarianism.

The result was to marginalise adult education even more than previously. The survival of the liberal tradition itself became the issue and most of the difficulties and ideological tensions in adult education from the late 1970s emanated from this political change. We will consider the impact of this on the W.E.A. in the final chapter. Meanwhile, a brief consideration of controversy about two other short-term residential colleges illustrates the general issue.

### Wansfell College

Wansfell College is a wholly L.E.A.-owned and financed institution situated on the edge of Epping Forest in Theydon Bois, Essex. As with the Wedgwood Memorial College it was conceived and founded during the 1940s with a strong commitment, as we have seen, to the liberal adult education tradition. Walter Drews, the Principal of the college throughout most of the 1970s and the 1980s, completed an M.Sc. thesis in 1983 on the short-term colleges and Wansfell in particular.<sup>130</sup> The thesis contains a spirited defence of adult education against a background of current economic pressures and cuts. It underlines the realities that, at the time of writing, less than half of one per cent of the national education budget was devoted to adult education; not many more than one thousand full time professionals worked in adult education (in the liberal studies sphere); and all 30 L.E.A. short-term residential colleges cost less to run than one large comprehensive school. The thesis is a case-study, nevertheless, of the way a committed right wing critique of adult education - "the icing on the cake" - gained strength during the 1970s and undermined, economically and educationally, this most vulnerable sector of adult education. Seven of the short-term colleges were closed between 1978 and 1980. Drews gives a detailed account of the pressures put upon Wansfell college during the same period. On November 3rd 1978, The Evening News carried a substantial article written by a reporter who had



attended a week-end course at Wansfell. The article was entitled, 'Such Throwaway Days', and the theme was "luxury on the rates".

The reporter wrote:

Those who have discovered it, return time and again for a bargain break... While folk from all over the country enjoy themselves at Wansfell, courtesy of the Council, their schools are suffering.

The Saturday dinner was described as "superb" consisting of "melon, turkey, stuffing, cranberry sauce, apple flan and cream". The course was about the environment and even from the limited description given by the reporter it was evidently in the same mould as a W.E.A. social and political course in the sphere of ecology. The reporter summed it up, however:

It has been great fun, and a welcome rest. But an education? I'm not so sure about that. And what is more, I don't think I - nor any other of the guests - really care a damn.

A Theydon Bois villager was quoted, "I object to paying through rates... these throwaway week-ends are a farce. If I am going to contribute to a charity... I'd rather choose".<sup>131</sup>

A number of letters, some above the signatures of many students, were published opposing these views - after pressure from the Press Council, which felt that the article had been unfair and one-sided. Nevertheless, the Chairman of the Governing Body expressed concern about expenditure and suggested that the fees would have to be increased. The fees were increased and Wansfell College survived, but like the W.E.A. and all other adult education organisations and institutions in this climate and faced with similar pressures, survival becomes the dominant objective.

## Burton Manor College

The fate of Burton Manor College shows how, in the 1980s, a college may most successfully meet Central Government's educational criteria (right-wing tendency) for a highly successful self-financing programme of residential adult education only to face a new and devastating threat from Local Government (Militant Tendency) for allegedly not meeting or engaging with their political commitments.

Burton Manor College was founded under a Joint Agreement signed by six local authorities in 1946. After Local Government Re-Organisation in 1974 only three authorities were left: Cheshire, Wirral and Liverpool which together with the University of Liverpool make up the governing Body.<sup>132</sup>

At meetings of the Governing Body held in October 1985 it was revealed that it was quite clearly the intention of the Labour Party majority on the Liverpool City Council to close the college because they intended to realise the capital asset.

A motion to this effect was carried when the Liverpool City Councillors made certain that a majority could be achieved at an adjourned meeting held on the 11th October and closure of the college was determined for the 31st October 1986, with a sale of the property as soon as possible afterwards. Permission for both closure and sale of the property was to be sought for approval by the Secretary of State, as required by the Joint Agreement.<sup>133</sup>

No official reason for closure had been recorded in the minutes of the Governor's meeting, although through the news media the City Councillors justified the proposal in three ways:

- i) the college is too far from Liverpool to attract its residents;
- ii) the subjects offered are not relevant to the social and political priorities of the Liverpool people.
- iii) the college is too 'bourgeois' to suit Liverpool.<sup>134</sup>



The Diary columnist of The New Statesman, writing from Liverpool on 10th January 1986, referred to these actions by the members of the 'Militant Tendency' on the Liverpool City Council as:

... the latest gasp of Pol-Potism... in our beleaguered City...

Liverpool City Council is hatchetting Burton Manor, its residential College of Adult Education. One of the governors recounted that the Chairman of the Education Committee stated, "You have courses in Astronomy. What do working class people want with Astronomy?"<sup>135</sup> The aim was to sell this bourgeois institution and to use the money realised by the sale to build council houses in Liverpool.

A campaign was launched by the college and friends of Burton Manor from far and near, and this included information to the effect that the college was almost self-sufficient on recurrent annual financial costs, operating at maximum capacity with a balanced - and much praised and respected - programme of professional and liberal adult education courses including some work for the Liverpool unemployed. A steadily increasing number of Liverpool residents had been using the college. This campaign succeeded in deferring the closure until the Spring of 1987, at least.

We should note, in passing, that the Burton Manor affair has some features which are symptomatic of deep social and political divisions in contemporary Britain: Central Government versus Local Government; North versus South; Country House versus Council House; Inner City Poverty versus Green Belt Wealth; Militant versus Moderate (but also Left versus Left); Liverpool versus The Rest.

It is, however, the nature of the educational challenge to Burton Manor which is our concern here. The narrow and sectarian attack launched by the Labour Councillors against the college can be compared, ideologically, to some of the attacks on the W.E.A. and the long-term colleges in earlier decades. Plus ca change....



For at least eight decades there have been variations on the theme. If the Burton Manor closure threat has echoes of the most rigid and destructive sectarian militancy practised in the adult education movement five decades ago, we can return - by a coincidence of neat symmetry - to Ruskin College, which as I prepared this conclusion in the Autumn of 1986 became the centre of fresh controversy.

## CHAPTER TWO

### VII Colleges of Jude the Obscure - Where Passions Continue to Run Deep

The 1986 Ruskin College dispute has generated, as a by-product, some very clear and valuable re-assessments of the issues which concern us in this chapter and it demonstrates graphically the intractability of the problems we study and analyse.

Meanwhile, we left Ruskin in this chapter in the year 1910. Ruskin has experienced many agitations and internal conflicts and storms since then, most notably perhaps in the 1960s and the 1970s. The Ruskin College backlash against the 'key to a degree' in the late 1960s was part of the general student revolt of the period. There were tremendous arguments then: "People were saying we shouldn't become cut off from our class, we should cut off from Oxford".<sup>136</sup> In the early 1970s, there were disputes about matters of syllabus and a little later, the constitutionalities of representation and accountability.

#### The 'Selbourne Affair'.<sup>137</sup>

The 'Selbourne Affair' of 1986 became more important and disturbing for the college when Press and Parliament became involved, thereby giving the dispute a significance comparable to the controversies considered earlier in this chapter.

Briefly, what happened was this. David Selbourne, a politics tutor at Ruskin for twenty years had become more critical publicly of Labour movement organisations and their policies during the 1980s. In March 1986, The Times published an article by Selbourne which was critical of Labour politics in Liverpool. Like all newspapers owned by Rupert Murdoch, The Times was being 'blackened' at the time by the

print unions because of a major dispute about the introduction of new technology and this industrial action was being officially supported by the T.U.C. and the Labour Party. The Ruskin Students' Union carried a motion condemning Selbourne's action - publishing an article in The Times - as anti trade union. The R.S.U. demanded an apology from the tutor and threatened a boycott of his lectures if he refused. He declines to apologise; his lectures were boycotted and his tutorial students were allocated to other college tutors. In October, at the beginning of the new academic year, Selbourne believed that the college was unable or unwilling to defend the conditions (academic freedom) he regarded as necessary for continuing his work and his case was widely publicised and supported in the national press.

The Principal of Ruskin (who had been absent on sabbatical leave during the critical term) wrote to The Guardian on Friday 17th October a brief letter saying, "There is considerable dispute about the facts of this case. Mr. Selbourne has instructed a solicitor. In the circumstances I do not believe I can comment further".

The dispute about the facts of the case need not concern us in too much detail, although it is necessary, and useful, to summarise the main issues in dispute.

Selbourne claimed that there had been intimidation and harrassment of students who had wished to attend his lectures and tutorials (pickets with a banner, barring the way to his lectures); that his fellow tutors had not supported him in his stand for academic freedom - indeed, they and the college had supported the students against him; that the Ruskin Group of the A.U.T. had failed to support him and had compromised its support of academic freedom, and that even Selbourne's invigilation of examinations was turned into a political issue.



The college did not respond officially to these allegations in the press, for the reasons stated above. His teaching colleagues did, however, write to the press to refute the above allegations.

Roy Moore who had chaired two meetings of the Ruskin A.U.T. in May said in The Guardian (Oct. 20th) that these meetings had sought to uphold his (Selbourne's) right to academic freedom and to condemn the forms of action adopted collectively by our students, but most of all to restore the college to normal working order. Moore said he had accompanied Selbourne to his intended lecture on May 12th, "as a gesture of symbolic support. There were no 'pickets'... but most of all there were no students in the hall". He concluded his letter stating that David Selbourne had, "neither attended any meetings of, made any complaint to, nor requested any assistance from the Ruskin A.U.T. Group".

Another Ruskin tutor, Stephen Howe, contributed to The Guardian correspondence:

I disagreed with his action in writing to The Times during the dispute, but respect - and have always defended his right - to do so... this appears to be the view of all my colleagues.<sup>138</sup>

Other letters and articles in The Guardian and The Times broadened the issue. A Guardian correspondent wrote:

The issue at stake as far as Ruskin and the Labour movement are concerned is the age-old one which confronts all socialists engaged in the class struggle: whose side are you on? Ruskin is clearly on the side of the print workers. Is Selbourne on the side of the capitalist press?<sup>139</sup>

The Times in a long editorial on October 16th, under the head-line 'The Selbourne Affair', questioned whether the State, which funds up to 90% of the college's income, should not use the sanction of threatened cuts of grant and a severing of the relationship between

Ruskin College and the University to support Mr. Selbourne and the principle of academic freedom. The editorial concluded with the heaviest kind of political question, speculating whether the treatment of Mr. Selbourne is a "sign of what may happen if Labour wins power?".

For the former Principal of Ruskin, however, the issue was more one of quite fundamental trade union rights; "... there are limits to conduct which outrages the natural human instincts of those who honour basic trade union principles".<sup>140</sup>

The Master of Balliol said that there were, "grounds for urgent concern" about Ruskin in a general article about academic and political freedom in The Times.<sup>141</sup>

An academic, from Hull University, stated what had become fairly evident from the volume and the range of response to a sudden political storm: "what is at stake is not simply a matter of academic freedom but inevitably a conflict of principles".<sup>142</sup>

#### A Social Historian's view - from the inside

The storm provoked several articles and letters to the press from Raphael Samuel, tutor in social history at Ruskin and although these are partisan and even polemical, Samuel is careful to place the 'Selbourne Affair' in the broad context of residential adult education and he seeks to engage with, and to 'harmonize', the several principles at issue in this latest Ruskin dispute.

His Guardian article,<sup>143</sup> written as a substantial and detailed reply to Hugo Young's presentation of the Selbourne issue, was more strictly ad hominen: making the case that Selbourne's own personality had been the key factor - dismissing, for example, the claim that the examination invigilation issue was anything of significance other than an example of Selbourne's predilection for melodrama.

Acknowledging that, "The Left in Britain has too poor a record on tolerance for it to be insensible to the cry of free speech",



he claimed that the college had, in fact, been extremely tolerant of Selbourne. A man, "truculent by disposition... normally hostile to the college authorities..." (but re-inforcing what former students had written in to say, supporting Selbourne) "his shining grace has been - up to the present year - his evident commitment to his students". He traced Selbourne's career as Campus revolutionary, Marxist theoretician, Bennite, through to, "latter-day persona as the honest Iago of the Left, in which phase he has been able to attack every socialist totem without so much of a murmur of college protest". Even so, here and in a later letter,<sup>144</sup> after Hugo Young had returned to the issue, Samuel paints a broader canvas: "Ruskin is not an ivory tower... Loyalties at Ruskin run deep and they are often conflictual".

But, it was in his major article, 'A Family at War', published in The Times Higher Educational Supplement<sup>145</sup> that he wrote a most eloquent - seminal, even - analysis of the dispute. It was rather ironic, as he recognised, that this was published in a Times paper given that the whole affair stemmed from Selbourne's decision to publish in The Times). It is fitting to conclude our selective historical review of the residential colleges by referring to this historian's attempt to grapple with the tensions from a deeply felt and still very active contemporary experience.

Ruskin, as befits the College of Jude the Obscure - the title given to it by Thomas Hardy in the 1912 Preface to his novel - is a place where passions run deep...

he begins, taking us back to consider why - back to a consideration of residence and community.

Ruskin is a small college and a residential one, an artificial community in which the individual is peculiarly exposed to others. It abstracts its students from the cocoon of domesticity. It sets up strains within the family; it propels its students into an



intensely communal life... The pedagogic principles of the college - those of a liberal education - also exposes the students to strain... ideologically, the students often feel under attack. They are told to be 'objective' on matters of basic belief. They are asked to see 'all sides of the question' where they were used to taking a stand. Ruskin, in short, changes people, and gives them a new, if precarious, individuality. It is college belief that the experience is a growing one, and that the tensions between liberal educational values and labour loyalties is creative...

Ruskin has often been swept by agitations... Each generation of students seems to produce a storm... Though fierce, they are usually short-lived, as with the student boycott some four years ago of a tutor who issued a fly sheet which the women in the college thought aggressive. These storms typically focus upon matters of college life... But because of the involvement of the students with their own prior existence, Ruskin is peculiarly subject to tremors from the world outside.

He then moves to the Selbourne issue, giving his personal account and view, building up to his bold-type survey of the key issues:

There is not one principle at issue in the present dispute but at least four. Each demands respect on its own count, diplomacy might find a way of harmonizing them.

- a) Free Speech. British radicalism was born in the movement for free speech... We cannot have double standards in this matter. A member of staff must have the liberty to speak his or her mind, especially if it is to express an unpopular opinion.
- b) Student rights. Students must have the right to express, demonstratively if need be, their disapproval of a lecturer...

- c) College teaching. Our first duty is obviously to continuity of teaching, and if, for whatever reason, this is threatened we should do everything we can to maintain it...
- d) Labour loyalties. The college's standing in the Labour movement will be judged by the totality of its work, and especially the quality of its teaching... From this point of view David Selbourne has served Ruskin well, and his freedom to speak his mind should be protected by his colleagues, especially those, like the present writer, who disagree with him.

Samuel finishes, facing the dilemma, seeing that though diplomacy may harmonize these principles they may continue to be, at times, irreconcilable:

In his Guardian article of November 14th, Hugo Young concluded that Ruskin faced a choice between its status as an academic institution and its character as a Labour college. A similar claim was advanced by The Times when it demanded intervention by the Government and Oxford University to bring the college to heel. Ruskin has lived with these dualities over a period of nearly 100 years. Indeed, all adult education thrives on the tension between critical inquiry and passionate commitment, and Ruskin's dilemma is in one sense simply a more immediate expression of the sometimes irreconcilable claims which are made upon it.

## CHAPTER THREE

### LITERATURE AND THE W.E.A.

What is Literature? How should it be taught? What is its importance as a subject in the W.E.A.? These are simple enough questions but they are, of course, very difficult to answer.

The conflicts that concerned Raymond Williams in his adult teaching demonstrate clearly enough that the answers can vary according to political and academic priorities. Literature is not, as it may appear, a relatively straight-forward, easy to place and define, politically neutral, subject.

The word literature is open to various meaning and interpretations: most commonly, in an educational context, it is used to refer to imaginative writing of high quality. And so most literature classes in adult education deal with novels, poems and plays which are subjected to literary criticism. But then, essays, biography, letters, journals, history and other kinds of writing can be - and in the past were - seen as literature. Study of literature obviously involves learning about the written and spoken language. Which should have primary emphasis - language and then literature, or the other way round? Has there been a bias, in the W.E.A., towards appreciation and criticism and against the practice of writing and creating literature? There continues to be real controversy about these questions within literature.

Even more difficult and contentious are the questions about the relationship between literature and social reality. Given that over the decades many active in the W.E.A. have approached literature and the arts as ethereal activities of the 'superstructure', the most challenging recent developments in thinking about literature are the



Marxist literary theories and arguments about ideology and 'base' and 'superstructure'.

Possibly the most searching chapter in Politics and Letters is that on 'Marxism and Literature' when the N.L.R. interviewers interrogate Raymond Williams sharply and critically on his change of stance to make a "frontal assault on the very idea of literature as such",<sup>1</sup> by arguing that there exists a complete continuum of creative practices of communication. Does not this lead to a complete relativism in which it becomes effectively impossible to discriminate between different forms of writing or types of work at all, they ask? This discussion which follows from this question covers a remarkable range of issues - science and writing about science; attempts to break down the dualism between literary and non-literary, imaginative and factual writing; structural linguistics as a form of abstract objectivism; reading Freud not as a scientist but as a kind of novelist; literary criticism as a presumptively objective technique - right through to the fundamental theoretical position which Williams advances in his book, Marxism and Literature which is a cultural materialism.

In brief, he argues that the conventional Marxist notion of economic production failed to grasp the character of the production of a social and political order but even more conspicuously failed also to understand the material character of the production of a cultural order. He illustrates the point specifically:

The economy Marx described was much more directly related to satisfying, or rather failing to satisfy, basic human needs than the economy of advanced capitalism. By the time you have got to the point when an E.M.I. factory producing discs is industrial production, whereas somebody elsewhere writing music or making an instrument is at most on the outskirts of production, the whole question of the classification of activities has become very difficult.<sup>2</sup>

Agreement or disagreement with the theoretical position is not the relevant issue here. What is pertinent and striking is how the developing arguments about literature cover the terrain at the heart of this thesis - relativism, objectivity, development in primary production and culture forcing changed social and political priorities.

From this perspective and with all these questions in mind we should now go back and see how literature has been experienced, how it has evolved as a subject for study in adult classes run by the W.E.A. and how it has been taught.

### Literature in Education Generally

First, we should recall that in the formal educational institutions - the schools, the colleges, the universities - literature has been taught as a subject for many years (centuries, in fact) and that has coloured and often determined the approach of adults and their teachers to literature. Literature as part of Litterae Humaniores preceded English Literature which for a long time lived in the shadow of the study of the Classics and both have been overlain with the longer shadow of class thinking. This is very clear in the 'Farrar Report' of 1868<sup>3</sup> in which English is considered inferior to the Classics and suitable for Board rather than Public Schools. For many years then, through the 19th century and well into the 20th century, English literary studies had to struggle to escape the charge that, in contrast with the Classics, 'English' was a non-subject, and:

... the English gentlemen who occupied the early professorships at the ancient universities no more needed a course of specialised training how to read their own literature than they needed a course of training in how to give orders to their domestic servants.

Yet, there were after all, Professors of English... The simple solution available to them was to study English Literature but to



pretend that it was something else - to systematically mistake it for the 'classics'<sup>4</sup>

Existing in these shadows then, a division developed in English between that minority 'hard' subject with a linguistic and neo-classical core offering the road to social advancement, and a majority 'soft' option with a humane literary centre offering moral improvement.

Literature certainly had early idealist promoters making large claims for both its centrality and its universality. Henry Sidgwick wrote in the 1860s:

Let us demand that all boys, whatever their special bend and destination, be really taught literature; so that as far as possible, they may learn to enjoy intelligently poetry and eloquence; that their interest in history may be awakened, stimulated, guided; that their views and sympathies may be enlarged and expanded by apprehending noble, subtle, and profound thoughts, refined and lofty feeling: that some apprehension of the varied developments of human nature may ever abide with them, the source and essence of a truly humanising culture.<sup>5</sup>

And Matthew Arnold saw poetry as replacing religion in the life of the people, "more and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us; to console us, to sustain us."<sup>6</sup> The 1880 Report to the School Inspectorate had the same vision:

Good poetry does undoubtedly tend to form the soul and character; it tends to beget a love of beauty and of truth in alliance together; it suggest... high and noble principles of action, and it inspires the emotion so helpful in making principles operative. Hence, its extreme importance to all of us.<sup>7</sup>

The 'Newbolt Report' in 1921 took the force of that 'all' by stressing that English was centrally important for the, "teeming population



outside the wall", and literature was described as not just a subject for academic study but one of the chief temples of the human spirit in which we all worship.<sup>8</sup>

Later, Leavis and Scrutiny had a profound impact upon the status of English and the teaching of literature. Leavis elevated English out of the shadow to be, "chief of the humanities" and "literature and humane culture" are asserted to be essential to civilisation.<sup>9</sup> But the discipline of Leavisian English, developing discriminating minds through 'practical criticism' and a rigorous training of intelligence and sensibility, brought a new kind of class thinking into English. Only a few are thought capable of this level of discrimination but this minority, having fostered these powers of discrimination in an English School of the University, could then go out beyond the walls on their civilising mission. They did, and this helped produce that change in how English was seen in many schools where English Language now became the 'soft' majority subject, linking non-examination English with life and experience (now that grammar had passed from the scene) and correspondingly English Literature was seen as a harder minority subject, looking towards the specialised Sixth Form course with its own critical conventions and terminology.

Michael Saunders in his book on English teaching stresses the profound influence that Leavis had on school teaching and, after quoting some famous extracts from Education and the University, he offers this comment:

The high intellectual status of English is felt by some to be threatened by the less rigorous view of the subject introduced by teachers committed to creativity rather than to the demanding business of study. It is this tradition of literary critical scholarship, of careful and informed reading and comment, that they

are at pains to defend in the schools<sup>10</sup>

This is a defence not just against 'creativity' but also against the development represented, in the 1960s, by the very successful integration of text-books like Reflections<sup>11</sup> into English studies in the secondary school. In this book, the only questions relating to the passages and the extracts are calculated to encourage discussion and oral comprehension. The book attempts to identify the social conditions in which children live and to construct an English programme round literature which reflected that world. This concept of English does not allow of the separation of language and literature work and it also tends to extend the boundaries of the subject. It is not a big step from this sort of reference across 'English' to 'Social Studies' to a questioning of the boundaries themselves. Peter Abbs' argument in English for Diversity shows how disciples of 'English through Experience', seeing the personal and social growth of individual pupils as their aim, want to reject the notion of academic disciplines with definable limits and particular values:

We need to break the illusion of separate subject. Education is about life. Life is a fabric of relationships - the child should grasp this through his experience. Subjects which break off areas of knowledge and set up as independent islands have deceptive powers. Traditional teaching of subject - first lesson in French, third lesson R.I. - is death to the understanding and should go.<sup>12</sup>

Life for the vast majority of school pupils and students involves TV viewing, comic and magazine reading, use of the electronic media for all kinds of popular music - listening, 'consuming' and, sometimes, making their own music. The attitude of English teachers over the last two decades has ranged from opposition to the 'mass media' to attempts by growing numbers of teachers to introduce contemporary music, television, newspapers, comics and advertisements into English



for stimulus and study.

Thus, there have been a range of different attitudes and approaches to the teaching of language and literature in the more formal educational institutions but the connection or relevance of some curricula to the life and the English used outside - in the home, the playground, the workplace, the pubs and so on - has not always been apparent or immediate.

Adult education movements have needed to try to connect the subject and its teachers to the "teeming population outside the university walls" because these movements have been concerned to bring interested adults voluntarily to study and the question of the value of the study of this or that approach to literature is likely to be raised earlier and more directly by the students than in other spheres of education.

What teachers have learned is relevant, of course, but the history of the less formal, self-organising institutions like the Labour Colleges and the W.E.A. and their 19th century predecessors, shows that adult students were often able to challenge, from their direct experience, the curricular rigidities, systems and methodologies of teaching. That is what Tawney learned in his adult classes in economics - about experiences his discipline did not yet include.

An important aim in this chapter is to examine what has happened within one major discipline where the decisions have been made about the content and pedagogy outside the framework of examinations and where the students have been able to and have often enough been encouraged to, make their own choices. When they have done so they have sometimes taken willing teachers with them to new areas of concern, like the relations between culture and society, fiction and film, television and the press.

On the other hand, the examples of adult classes where literature



has been taught - with positive student support - following closely the lines of university and college courses the tutors themselves did sometimes many years previously may indicate something about the hegemonic power of these institutions, from where the assumptions about what a 'subject' is and what education in that subject means spread and permeate even those areas and sections of the population where there might, for various reasons, be not only some ideological resistance to those assumptions but also formally and in practice the means for effecting a change, if only...

### Literature in 19th Century Adult Education

The Adult Schools movement, the Chartists, the Mechanics Institutes, the Working Men's Colleges, the University Extension movement - all involved themselves with education in English and Literature and all had the avowed aim of extending education to a wider public. We should look at the way literature was read, experienced, practised and taught in the period immediately before the W.E.A. because this throws light upon some key problems.

### The Mechanics Institutes

It is interesting to look at the Mechanics Institutes because the issues of student control, the influence of social class attitudes and ideological pressures on curricular development, and on priorities in subject choice and promotion, were open and explicit from the earliest years.

The Mechanics Institutes, as Birkbeck's biographer says, came "under the control of the moneyed classes, and became props of orthodoxy and respectability, instead of independent working class organisations".<sup>13</sup> In many of the Institutes political and religious

discussions, even newspapers, were banned and in some, 'literature' was kept out too:

Owing to the objections entertained by some of the influential supporters of the Institution, not only were works of fiction and general literature excluded from the library, but even it has been asserted that admission of historical and biographical works was constantly opposed. It was not, therefore, to be expected that the Mechanics Institutes of Leeds should succeed in the same ratio as other societies. Indeed, it is certain that this exclusive principle led to the establishment in 1834 of the Leeds Literary Institution, for the purpose of providing a library, comprising all works of value and interest in the English Language.<sup>14</sup>

The curricula of the Institutes were intended to be primarily concerned with the natural sciences, and the Edinburgh School of Arts model was:

... widely cited as the purest expression of the original ideas and its curriculum was copied by a number of other Institutes. The plan of the School... was to teach chemistry and mechanical philosophy. Mathematics was soon added, but other seemingly more 'practical' offerings like veterinary medicine were resisted by the Directors as being outwith their purpose. The central position in the curriculum of physics, chemistry, mathematics, the earth and life sciences... characterised the great majority of Institutes in their very early years... The general tendency during the 1830s was for the proportion of courses in the natural sciences to be diluted, usually by the addition or substitution of the fine and performing arts, languages, drawing and the like.<sup>15</sup>

By the 1840s, literature was a popular subject in most of the Institutes with the now predominantly middle class students.

We can gain some idea of the nature of this radical shift in the balance of the curriculum in the Institutes from the fact that in



Liverpool between 1840 and 1849 Literature (including The Drama) was the most popular subject (the total number of lectures exceeding those for any other subject or single category) and an analysis of the lectures at the Manchester Atheneum over a slightly longer period (from 1835 - 1849) shows that Poetry and The Drama was the category for which there were by far the largest number of lectures and the separate category of 'General and Polite Literature' was afforded more lectures than Geology, Botany, Education, History, Anatomy and Physiology.

J.W. Hudson, writing a history of the 'Mechanics and Literary Institutions' in 1851, noted about these lectures in Literature that, "the lecturer has in too many instances been rather the object of attraction than the lecture."<sup>16</sup> And he observed critically that the:

... tendency of the Atheneum (Manchester) like other popular Literary Institutions has, during the last seven years, been towards light and meretricious subject; this is apparent in the selection of books for the library, as well as in the lectures themselves. He gave these figures to illustrate his point:<sup>17</sup>

	First 7 years	Last 7 years
Lectures: Science - Physical	173	57
" " - Mental	-	24
" Literature & Education	54	108
" Fine Arts	125	205

The '1919 Report' drew lessons from the experience of the Mechanics Institutes and Tawney returned to these many times when addressing the W.E.A.. The instruction which the Institutes offered was unsystematic and it became more unsystematic as the desire to attract large audiences led to the popularisation of the teaching. The Institutes lowered the demands made of students to keep up attendances



and as the Mechanics dropped out, the middle class came in:

... with the result that the movement tended, in the words of an indignant correspondent, "to be swallowed up by the vortex of gentility."<sup>18</sup>

### The London Working Men's College

The situation in the London Working Men's College a little later was rather different: here there was a deliberate attempt to break from some of the restrictions and the bans of the Mechanics Institutes, particularly the ban on politics and controversy, including religious controversy:

Once bring in politics and history, and you are encountered at every turn by questions which cannot be passed over, and upon which if you speak with any distinctness, you must intrude upon religious and even ecclesiastical ground! This was a problem that the Mechanics Institutes had met with a rigid ban on politics and theology. But Maurice realised that this was precisely one of the reasons why the Institutes had failed to attract working men; they wished to discuss these problems; it was no use saying to them 'Have a class in chemistry instead', for their all too effective reply was to stay away... The proposed Humanity course was to consist of Politics, Ethics, and Language; and closely linked with these were to be History and Literature.<sup>19</sup>

More than this, F.D. Maurice (founder and first Principal of the College) recognised that the adult students would not come primarily for instruction in 'subjects' neatly divided according to academic distinctions. However, the students at the College also refused to recognise other distinctions that the founders themselves had felt to be important: the distinction between liberal and technical studies - that is, between those studies which broadened a man's mind and

taught him how to think, and which were appropriate to the College, and those which were largely vocational and pursued because they helped the student to get on in the world. The College Annual Report of 1862 put it this way:

...we have feared lest our own pupils and those who may concern themselves in our proceedings, should ever fancy that we regard our class-instruction as an end instead of a means, or as a means to certain material advantages of the particular student, rather than to the moral elevation of himself and of the class to which he belongs.<sup>20</sup>

But this view of the founders was not shared by large numbers of the students, especially the working class students who, initially at least, showed a more utilitarian interest in education. The College was:

... in a position similar to the Mechanics Institutes some 30 years earlier when they too after 6 years of effort stopped in 1830 to review what they had accomplished; and discovered it is easier to start an institution for adult education according to a priori principles, than to keep it on the narrow path of those principles once it has started.<sup>21</sup>

Reviewing the position in the Working Men's College Magazine in April 1861, one of the founder members expressed some concern about the trends. The subjects which did not appear at all - "and this chiefly because they are never asked for, or by so few that classes can only be formed at intervals" - such as Political Science, were precisely those which the founders had always said should be foremost in a Working Men's College; and History and Literature, the great humanistic studies, which were low down on the list, had been regarded as second in importance. The study of language, which seems to "sweep into the French and Latin classes about a third



part of our entire number, is that which we have done least to encourage".<sup>22</sup> And the author of the review scornfully reproached the "crowd who flock to the Latin and French class rooms" with doing so merely because, "educated people learned these tongues, that they were, in fact, the correct thing."

Whatever the class background of the students - skilled craftsmen, clerks or shopmen - they showed an equal disregard for those subjects on which the founders had placed prime importance. This was most marked in the case of Political Science. Maurice was convinced that the neglect of this subject in the Mechanics Institutes was one of the causes of their decline, and in his lectures on Learning and Working he had asserted:

... that an Education such as I am proposing for men, will fail altogether of its object, if it does not teach Politics; if it does not give great prominence to them; if it attempts to disguise the purpose by any subterfuge whatever.<sup>23</sup>

Yet his suggestion was to teach politics through history or literature, and one of the original classes advertised in October 1854 was his 'Political Terms Illustrated by English Literature'. The response was meagre - eight students in the first term, and only five in the second; and this remained true of all attempts to run classes in the subject; invariably they either collapsed or limped along for a term with small numbers. Harrison, writing his history of the College in the 1950s, concludes:

Clearly, there was no great abiding interest in politics and political economy among the students who came to the College. It is impossible to believe that they found the subject too difficult for them, when they were prepared to study advanced mathematics; and unlikely that they suspected indoctrination with orthodox political economy from those who, as Christian Socialists



had so fiercely assailed competitive society. No, as has already been suggested, by 1854 the thoughts and interests of the ex-Chartists had been directed into other channels; political methods had been tried and had yielded in few tangible results; and so they now turned to other, potentially fruitful, fields of activity.<sup>24</sup>

### Self-education Culture and Socialism

In many lives, of course, literature is not experienced as a 'subject' at all: books are read and discussed, poems are heard, plays are seen, and so on. Harrison again writes about the importance of this in his History of the Working Men's College:

It is a characteristic of adult education that, although most methods of formal education assume a breakdown in the sum of knowledge into a number of separate disciplines for purposes of study, the adult student, because of his lack of indoctrination in this technique, refuses to accept this division into fairly rigidly defined 'subjects'. He is concerned usually with problems in the first instance, not subjects narrowly defined; and thus, his interests cannot be fully catered for along the lines of academic subjects labelled 'history', 'economics', or 'literature'. This for the teacher is at once one of the greatest difficulties and joys of adult education.<sup>25</sup>

It was very much the case with self-educated adults - like many of the radicals in the 19th century - that, in the ferment of activity generated around political campaigns the excitement of education gripped the imagination and produced some extraordinary conversions and commitments.

Thomas Cooper, the Chartist, rose at 3.00am or 4.00am and would read until setting off for work, then again after work he covered a wide field of reading in history, literature, and metaphysics,

and committed speeches and whole Acts of Shakespeare to memory. Then, later at Chartist meetings in Leicester, held on weekday evenings as well as Sundays, "unless there were some stirring local and political topics, I lectured on Milton, and repeated portions of Paradise Lost, or on Shakespeare and repeated portions of Hamlet, or on Burns, and repeated Tam o'Shanter." <sup>26</sup>

In the Chartist Halls at Manchester, Oldham, Leeds, Birmingham and in other towns and cities, educational activities were to the fore, and men like Cooper would lead the discussions and give the lectures on science, literature, the fine arts, morals, theology, social and political economy. At the Sheffield meeting place:

... discussions and meetings took place weekly. Harvey and others lecturing on such topics as the history of the working class and on the walls hung home-made banners inscribed with the names of working class heroes ranging from Wat Tyler to Byron and Shelley. <sup>27</sup>

And not just in the urban areas: in the weaving villages of Ayrshire in the 1840s, Cobbett's Register, the Black Dwarf, the Northern Star were read and passed round and, "literature too is a favourite pursuit of the weaving population". Because:

... though immediate political issues necessarily predominated in Chartist literature, the journals also contained moral, cultural, and scientific material which provided material for reflection and discussion... The Northern Star devoted almost an entire page (broadsheet) to literature. Byron was an especial favourite, but Burns, Shelley, Whittier, Clare, Mackey, were also represented as well as Chartist verse. <sup>28</sup>

It was the same in the 1880s, when there was a renewed Labour movement growth and intense political activity. Many of the leading political activists had found the means to self-education as their forerunners in the Chartist movement had done. People like Joseph Arch, Keir Hardie,



Harry Snell and Will Thorne developed a passion for learning, reading widely in the most difficult conditions. The miner's leader, Robert Smillie, "was taught to read by his grandmother, and by the age of fourteen knew something of Burns, had read several of Shakespeare's plays and some of his sonnets." Like others, he became enthralled by Shakespeare, and he read Dickens, Scott, Morris, Shaw, and he collected books:

Before I had been ten years married, I had a fair library for a working man... Today, the walls of my sitting room are not only lined with books, but hung with portraits of Carlyle, Ruskin, Russell Lowell, Longfellow, Walt Whitman, Burns and Scott.<sup>29</sup>

The young Keir Hardie attended night school and became an avid reader. In his home he had available, in addition to the Bible, Pilgrim's Progress, Paine's Age of Reason and Burns' poems. Tom Mann also attended night school for three nights a week and at Sunday school a gifted teacher awoke what was to become a "lifelong passion for poetry".<sup>30</sup>

Sheila Rowbotham, writing about the responses of working class students to the University Extension movement has said:

It was not a simple question of left and right, for they chose their heroes and mentors from both camps higgledy piggledy - King Alfred and Oliver Cromwell, John Wesley or William Morris, Ruskin, Dante, Carlyle, the historian J.H. Green, Thomas Hardy, Dickens. The forces of light were a mixed bunch indeed. They were important because they seemed to indicate a world which was not based on profit and gain. A Manchester socialist, a clerk in a foundry works, asserted: "I'm dead against materialism though I've no religion in my composition. I want to live in my spirit. I want to feel more, and to see more deeply into the truth of things".<sup>31</sup>



## Literature, Social Purpose and Socialism

The Mansbridgean view of education is probably best seen as part of this Zeitgeist: in the formative years of British socialism the ideological revolt was moral, ethical, and aesthetic as much as it was economic and political; 'democratic readings' from the Romantic Poets, the cult of beauty deriving from the Pre-Raphaelites, the writing of Ruskin, and William Morris's views on Art and Society, the Utopian visions of Morris, Bellamy and others, the aesthetic movement of the 1880s and the 1890s - all of this formed part of the 'common sense' of the socialist movement at the turn of the century, when the W.E.A. was born. This is an account of the Oxford Summer School in 1907:

The summer meeting this year was organised with a view to attracting artisans and work people in greater numbers than hitherto. An unprecedentedly large contingent of them came up, and the Vice-Chancellor gave them a special word of welcome in his address at the opening ceremony... The Professor of Poetry's lecture on William Morris sent them back to their lodgings with a glow of admiration, and one household at least sat up till the small hours discussing the art of Utopia. Only, like others before them, they 'asked for more'. One wondered what made them so receptive to this side of Oxford influence. No doubt, it was because they came so well prepared. But their preparation was not that of the secondary school... but of the newspaper, the trades union, and the political club... For them, as for the Athenians, politics are the gate to all the arts and all the sciences. William Morris and Walter Crane are names to conjure with; but they only 'loomed into their ken' because both are socialists. Socialism is, of course, a coat of many colours, and that alone would serve to make it an inexhaustible topic of conversation. It includes within its scope

every subject that ever has been and ever could be included under literae humaniores, from metaphysics at one end to economics at the other.<sup>32</sup>

A description of one of Tawney's early classes reveals something of the same inspiration and breadth of interest:

The class meeting is over, and we sit at ease, taking tea and biscuits provided by members' wives. Talk ranges free and wide - problems of philosophy, evolution, politics, literature. Then R.H. Tawney reads to us Walt Whitman's When lilacs last in the dooryard bloomed: this moves a student to give us his favourite from the same source; Pioneers! O Pioneers! Another follows quoting from a poem of Matthew Arnold that evidently has bitten him, one ending with the magic line, The unplumb'd salt estranging sea.

And for some of us as we sit listening, a new door opens.<sup>33</sup>

Many radicals and socialists came to their political maturity under influences like this. John Squire, the first literary editor of the New Stateman was a devotee of the Pre-Raphaelites as an under-graduate; "You positively must read a few elementary socialists things soon", he wrote to his fiancée, "William Morris and Ruskin to start on. You will realise that Socialism is far more a moral and ethical - even artistic movement - than a political one". In 1907 he described an S.D.F. meeting at which a blind man played and sang Wagner, and some of the other Marxist comrades were engaged in a heated discussion about Tolstoy's views on Shakespeare, "Navvies, shoemakers and casual labourers," he wrote, "the more I see them the more I marvel at them".<sup>34</sup>

The strengths of this autodidact tradition which so impressed John Squire are seen in a man like Tommy Jackson who left school at fourteen, worked as a compositor, became an S.D.F. member and then a Labour College organiser, before working full-time for the Communist



Party in the 1920s. When he was imprisoned in 1926, Jackson re-read his beloved Dickens and Gibbon and renewed his familiarity with Smollett and Macaulay:

Finally, for want of anything better, he picked up a volume of Jane Austen. He read with 'mounting ecstasy' pressing the book up against the fading light coming from the barred window until it was impossible to read any longer, then woke at dawn and went without breakfast to finish the book.<sup>35</sup>

We should keep that individual experience at the front of our minds because literature considered as a subject in workers' education was often seen from a different perspective. For politically active members of the Labour movement conscious of the growing power of that movement in the early years of this century, there were clear educational priorities in workers' education, and those subjects (economics, politics, and social studies) which would directly aid the emancipation of the working class were given pride of place. From this viewpoint, literature could be a superstructural diversion. In the sequence of events which led to the foundation of the Plebs League, the famous 1909 Ruskin College strike and the Labour College break-away, the subject of literature played its modest part: when the Principal of the College, Dennis Hird, came under pressure from the College governing body and a sub-committee proposed that he should cease teaching Sociology, Evolution and Logic and teach instead "less controversial ones" such as Literature, Temperance and Rhetoric, "the first real signs of discontent appeared amongst the students".<sup>36</sup>

The Labour College movement did not give any priority to Arts subjects, though English with an emphasis on writing and practical skills was taught and was popular in the correspondence course provision. Politics, economics and other subjects related to the political struggle were what was needed. Literature and the arts



offered, perhaps, an all too easy 'avenue of escape'.

Conflicting views were, however, expressed about this. In 1922 Ralph Fox wrote an article, published in Plebs, entitled Literature and Life which justified its study, saying it revealed the great traditions of the past and provided a mirror of the age in which it was written. This article was just one of a number published during 1921 and 1922 on the issue of a Marxist approach to literature and art.<sup>37</sup> A report of a meeting in 1925, published in Plebs 'Independent Working Class Education and Literature', carried these critical comments:

The view was strongly expressed by some of the 'old guard' that there was a dangerous tendency in the movement at the present in the direction of 'broadening' the aims and policy of the I.W.C.E. movement... space in Plebs had often been devoted of late to such subjects as poetry and literature - surely things of no concern to us in our work. The Plebs in the old days confined itself to things that mattered.<sup>38</sup>

Nevertheless, Plebs reviewed books and carried articles about literature and, even at the height of its polemical battles with the W.E.A., made favourable references to university books and W.E.A. teachers and classes on the subjects of literature, art and the sciences. These subjects could, without too much danger, be left to the W.E.A., but the class-collaborationist position of the Association polluted any attempt it made to educate workers in economics or politics.

At the same time, there were many active in the W.E.A. who shared this Labour College conviction that the adult classes should be primarily, and even exclusively, concerned with straight political subjects.

The attitudes of the first Secretary of the Yorkshire District (later the Yorkshire North District) of the W.E.A, George Thompson, are probably representative of the socialist wing of the W.E.A..

The son of a radical master-joiner in Halifax, he followed his father's trade and qualified his father's politics only by becoming a socialist and staunch member of the Labour Party, believing that the W.E.A.'s role was that of, "providing the personnel of a political governing class".<sup>39</sup> He was District Secretary in Yorkshire for most years from 1914 to 1945:

He made the District largely in his own image, and after his retirement his shadow ruled for many months. Indeed, in a larger sense, George Thompson's spirit ruled adult education in Yorkshire W.E.A. and University Extra-Mural) after 1952 even from the grave<sup>40</sup> What was G.H. Thompson's attitude towards literature?

According to Margaret Cole, he had the stern view in the 1920s of wanting "sanction refused for classes in 'non-serious' subjects such as literature".<sup>41</sup> But when he addressed the Leeds Branch of the Association of Tutors on The Field of Study for W.E.A. Classes, in 1938, he was not quite so severe. He said:

Literature, including Drama, has always had a place in the W.E.A. field of studies. I think there were more classes in Literature in the early days than is sometimes imagined. In spite of this, however, I meet a great many in the Association who count it less than no good to the workers. They regard it as a 'soft option', a 'Cissie' subject, as something little better than entertainment and certainly of no significance to those active working class organisations.

This does not, however, square altogether with my own experience...<sup>42</sup> He gives as examples an individual trade unionist and an I.L.P. group who had impressed him by what they had learned from the subject.

He goes on:

The trouble is that Literature is not a subject with a limited range as are Economics, Local Government, Biology, Music etc..



Writers count the whole of human experience as legitimate copy.

That is why exponents can speak so easily of Literature and Life, and even say that Literature is Life...

But whilst the,

... catholicity of Literature is most admirable for the general reader,... it does create very serious difficulties when trying to estimate compass and purpose in the W.E.A. field of study. I think it is also responsible for the rather extravagant claims sometimes made for the subject.

Nevertheless,

I recognise that Literature has very strong appeal to working class women students. This is not at all surprising. Those who are married constitute the majority of women in W.E.A. classes. Their environment is the home and family and their contacts are personal. They tend to view the problems of life through persons, and they may get from Literature something which is perhaps beyond the ken of many of us. So again I am forced back to the judgement of the tutor, and his appreciation of working class needs.<sup>43</sup>

What we get in Thompson is a rather grudging acceptance of Literature in the right class with the right tutor but a suspicion of claims that Literature and the Arts humanised and civilised per se. Thompson's approach to workers' education was deeply critical of the Mansbridgean 'Metaphysical Interpretation'.<sup>44</sup> He was less dismissive of the Labour Colleges than he was of the Extra-Mural Departments. Generally, he took G.D.H. Cole's line, stressing the complementary relationship of the two institutions.

Given these views and attitudes, it is interesting to note that the Board of Education Inspector who was charged with the responsibility for the W.E.A. in Yorkshire during the early years was the Shakespeare scholar, and editor of the New Cambridge Shakespeare, John Dover Wilson.



In 1928 he wrote:

The discovery of George Thompson made the creation of the Yorkshire District a possibility. His genius... in a couple of years made the Yorkshire District the greatest instrument for the development of adult education that this country has yet seen.<sup>45</sup>

Others active in the W.E.A. at the same time as Thompson placed greater emphasis on the positive possibility of liberation through individual study. The North Staffordshire Miners' Higher Education Movement stated in its Aims in 1911:

... the Movement is concerned with the type of Higher Education which makes for human development - the higher development of thought and feeling in the individual.<sup>46</sup>

And in that same year, 1911, the North Staffs. Miners had 13 courses, including three in Literature (Shakespeare, Dickens, and Six English Poets). Cecil Scrimgeour, in his history of the W.E.A. North Staffs. District, writes on these Aims:

We may note, in passing, the plain, single-point statement of objective: there was no explicit mobilising of knowledge in order to promote social and industrial change or to equip men for the exercise of civic rights and responsibilities (two of the foremost concerns of the W.E.A. later, in its maturity)... The liberal and humane studies (history, philosophy, literature, natural sciences) were paramount because ultimately they were all concerned with human freedom and with the ceaseless struggle to lift men up to the full dignity which the responsible exercise of that freedom endows them with.<sup>47</sup>

But the boundaries were not really clear between the 'liberal' and the 'social purpose' objectives and there was much overlapping as motives and attitudes varied from individual to individual, from locality to locality. Furthermore, the classes were taught, in the

main, by university trained tutors who would bring their own motives and attitudes. Often enough there was a harmony, with the tutor prepared to be flexible or even eager to extend beyond his training or even beyond his subject. But also, no doubt, there were cases where the tutor persuaded the class to do what he wanted to do. T.S. Eliot was only one of the better known adult tutors to get away with this when, as a relatively unknown poet, faced with a class enrolled to study 19th century literature, he managed to persuade its members that their real interest lay in the 17th century.<sup>48</sup>

#### The Popularity of Literature in W.E.A. Classes.

From a modest presence in class programmes in the first two decades, Literature climbed to a peak of popularity with W.E.A. members in 1930 with 600 classes organised (26% of the total W.E.A. provision in that year). That number of classes was not surpassed until after the Second World War but by the 1970s the W.E.A. was running over 1,000 literature classes annually.

The W.E.A.'s subject analysis of classes for 1978/79 divides literature into three categories:

	No. of courses	
English Literature and Language	932	9.5%
Modern Language, Literature and Culture	207	2.1%
Welsh Language, Literature and Culture	104	1.1%

Literature classes, as a percentage of total provision, declined after 1930, and steadily evened out to about 10% of the total classes from the 1960s through the 1970s to the 1980s.

Subjects, as we see, can fluctuate quite dramatically in the adult education 'popularity ratings', and the fortunes of literature need to be set against the changing balance in other subjects to see the full picture: social studies, averaging 50% of total provision in the 1920s and for most of the 1930s, climbed to 68% in 1944,



going back to between 50% and 60% in the late 1940s and the 1950s, and declining to between 20% and 30% in the 1960s and the 1970s. International affairs classes drew many students during the war years in the 1940s (900 classes in 1942/43, which was 22% of the total) but this subject had dropped to less than 2% of the total in the late 1970s (159 courses in 1978/79). Classes in history, which had fluctuated only between 4% and 12% of classes for four decades, experienced an increase after the Second World War up to 24% but this was due entirely to increased interest in Local History, and in the mid-1970s slightly more than half of the 1,500 courses (which formed 17% of the total) were devoted to local history. Economics, which stood at 18% in 1931 was down to 6% at the end of that decade, stayed at 5% in the 1950s and was down to 2% through the 1970s. Psychology experienced a post-War boom (up to 10% in the late 1940s) but it too had dropped to less than 2% by the late 1970s.<sup>49</sup>

Literature has clearly remained more steadily popular than several other key W.E.A. subjects. Why? It is possible that some of the students attending these classes in the decades after the Second World War might earlier have attended more directly social and political subjects. Richard Hoggart, writing in the late 1950s, gave this account of the reasons why adults were coming to literature classes:

Speaking roughly, we may say that in the late 19th century, the impulse to attend adult education classes was, for very many students, that kind of moral purposefulness which had established Non-conformity, and the Labour movement. The demand was predominantly for 'education for social purpose', by which was meant something simple and recognisable... education which equipped a man to take his place as a citizen of a democratic community, and, usually, to work for the good of his social class. The students came because they saw the problems before them and wanted equipment to tackle



those problems. Today it would be truer to say that many come because they feel morally and politically bewildered.

Of course, individuals join such a group for a variety of secondary reasons, and more than one reason may be present in the same person. So, some may come to literature classes for further professional training, some because they think that the sign of a 'cultured person' is the ability to talk about books, some because they suspect that there is to be gained from reading a pleasure which they are at present denied. But probably the central reason, common to almost all who stay after the first month (however hidden this may be from the student himself) is that each of them is in some way dissatisfied with the terms of his life, and seeks a moral basis of criticism and perhaps of action. He feels obscurely that literature will speak to his condition.<sup>50</sup>

### Content and Pedagogy

A study was made of all extant syllabuses of literature classes promoted by the Oxford Tutorial Classes Committee since 1909 and a report on this survey was written for Rewley House Papers in 1960.<sup>51</sup> This survey, entitled 'Development of Literature Teaching in Oxford Tutorial Classes' is divided into three sections: Popularity, Subject Matter and Method. On the popularity of literature the report states that the subject has always been fairly important in adult education, "though the Tutorial Class Movement did not take kindly to it at first" and Oxford's first class did not begin until 1917 at Stoke. The slow growth over the decades is recorded in this table:<sup>52</sup>

1918	15 total	2 Literature	1948	84 total	14 Literature
1928	32 total	3 "	1958	115 total	33 "
1938	46 total	5 "			

Under the heading of 'Subject Matter' the article states that Victorian Literature is one of the most popular subjects and in the early years the most popular contemporary authors were Wells, Bennett, Shaw and Galsworthy, with Housman, Bridges and Masfield.

Forster, Lawrence, Eliot and Joyce "were ignored until the 1930s, and James and Hopkins did not appear on syllabuses until the very late 1930s... With foreign authors a more enlightened picture emerges largely because of the continuous popularity of the drama... Though Dostoevsky was introduced as early as 1925, along with Ibsen.<sup>53</sup>

The influence of Empson, Leavis, Murray and Richards can be seen by the later 1930s when their books appear on book lists and, "after a modest time-lag of about five years, this critical ferment begins to have an influence in adult education".

'Public Expression' had been taught at Summer School back in 1920, and a 'Culture and Environment' emphasis is noted after the Second World War. Classes on 'The Cinema' were run from 1950.

On the 'Method of Teaching Literature', the report says that, in the early years the 'lecture technique of teaching' was predominant, and in these courses the approach was formal and academic.

A tendency to crowd syllabuses was noted. The "second Literature class at Kettering in 1918 proceeded by single lectures, from the roots of our Literature, through Middle English and the Drama to the Pre-Raphaelites in twenty four weeks"; a course running through the session 1937/38 on 'The Place of Poetry' (Chaucer to the 20th century) spelt out what would be done each week, so that Lecture XV, for instance, was on "Tennyson - the character and personality of Tennyson; The Princess, Maud, In Memoriam, Idylls of the King, The Influence of Tennyson".<sup>54</sup>

But there was a "shift gradually to less formal discussions of the writers' quality and ability", and "strikingly apparent in recent



years is the great reduction in texts listed in syllabuses to be studies, so that a course on six novels from Jane Austen to E.M. Forster in 1952 spent several weeks on the main novels and such a course has only one aim - to enable those who take part to read the books more thoroughly and therefore with greater enjoyment... Practical criticism has triumphed", concluded the report.<sup>55</sup>

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Another survey of literature classes provided by the W.E.A. was carried out at about the same time by a Working Party which presented a substantial report to the 1960 W.E.A. National Conference.<sup>56</sup> This was a wide ranging report on Aspects of Adult Education, and three subjects had been chosen 'for detailed analysis': economics, science, and literature. The Working Party was concerned to note that the subject 'economics' had declined sharply in W.E.A. programmes, but they wondered whether it could not be argued that shifts of 'consumer preference' must be accepted as they occur and that the movement must adapt itself.

The Working Party also asserted that it was difficult and perhaps unsatisfactory to draw a line between education for 'social purpose' and education for 'personal enrichment'. Literature, being seen, in fact, as a subject that stands on this boundary - the heading for the section of the report on literature classes being: 'Literature and the Quality of Life'. But the authors were a little wary of literature as a subject because it is able, "to be taught in such a way that it becomes an avenue of escape".<sup>57</sup>

The Working Party had read and considered 160 syllabuses of the 1958/59 session, these being roughly one quarter of the total of W.E.A. literature classes run that year. They had grouped the syllabuses as follows:



	<u>General</u>	<u>Specific Period</u>	<u>Specific Form</u>
Tutorial	10	16	7
Sessional	10	22	7
Terminal	-	3	3
	20	41	17

	<u>Specific Point of View</u>	<u>Drama</u>	<u>Totals</u>
Tutorial	11	8	52
Sessional	11	24	74
Terminal	3	12	21
	25	44	147

58

In observations on these syllabuses they had noted with admiration a "pioneer tutorial on foreign literature", where one year was to be spent on French Literature, one year on American and the final year on Russian Literature. But the members were rather scornful of a class called, 'How to enjoy Reading' which was attempting to study 20 novels, 18 poets, 8 plays and, "for good measure, the list ends with 5 biographies".

Special Period courses are often "as much history (of a kind) as literature". The shortest period studied on any syllabus was the period, 1890 - 1920.

Specific Form courses were almost equally divided between the novel and poetry, with two or three on biography.

Specific Point of View courses covered a wide range of titles

like 'Morality, Love and Religion' or 'Literary Landscapes'.  
A quarter of Drama classes were on Shakespeare; a few were on  
Greek Drama but Modern Drama was the most popular.<sup>59</sup>

### Conclusions

From this study, the Working Party offered some 'tentative  
conclusion':

- a) most literature classes "were not escapist";
- b) many classes were attempting too much;
- c) many classes relied upon lectures, often of a very formal kind;
- d) all too often syllabuses are constructed by tutors on the  
lines of university courses which they followed themselves;
- e) in courses where literature is studied against a historical  
background both are sometimes sketchy and superficial;
- f) few courses are concerned with genuinely linking subjects;
- g) one encouraging sign in the study of literature is increasing  
interest in foreign literature.<sup>60</sup>

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### Literature Classes in the W.E.A. Eastern District: 1950 - 1978

Using guidelines from the two reports above I have looked at the  
numbers of Literature classes (the titles and their range) in the  
Eastern District since 1950, and I have produced a breakdown of these  
using roughly the same categories as the Working Party. I then made  
an analysis of 300 literature syllabuses taught in the Eastern  
District from 1968 - 1978.

A. All 'Literature' Classes, Eastern District

	<u>General</u>	<u>Specific Period</u>	<u>Specific Form*</u>	<u>Specific Point of View</u>
1951/52	10	10	14	5
1955/56	10	5	17	0
1961/62	8	8	31	0
1965/66	1	12	22	0
1971/72	13	14	23	5
1975/76	13	11	30	5

	<u>Others</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>No. Exclusively on 20th century</u>
1951/52	0	38	12
1955/56	1	33	7
1961/62	9	56	26
1965/66	7	41	27
1971/72	6	61	23
1975/76	18	75	23

'Other' courses include 'Mass Media' (5 of these in 1961/62); English Language (only one or two of these over the whole period); Creative Writing, and Children's Literature (with a dramatic explosion of interest in this in the mid-1970s with 11 courses in 1975/76). If we add to the courses which dealt with 20th century literature the many others which also embraced modern and contemporary literature without indicating this in the title, then a good half and perhaps up to two thirds of the classes are concerned with the 20th century. Popular titles in General courses were 'Literature and Society', 'Reading for Pleasure', 'Reading and Criticism'. Courses on a Specific Point of View or theme include, 'Town and Country in Poetry and Fiction', 'The Family in 20th Century Literature' and 'Feminism in Literature'.



B.    \*Breakdown of Courses in a Specific Form

	<u>Novel</u>	<u>Poetry</u>	<u>Drama</u>	<u>TV Drama</u>	<u>Film</u>	<u>Biography</u>
1951/52	3	0	6	0	3	2
1955/56	4	3	9	0	1	0
1961/62	9	4	17	0	0	1
1965/66	10	2	7	0	3	0
1971/72	7	3	6	3	0	4
1975/76	8	4	10	4	0	2

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Syllabuses

Three hundred syllabuses from the Eastern District, covering the period 1968 - 1978, have been examined. These were prepared, and the courses were taught, by 10 full-time and 96 part-time tutors. And of these 300 classes, 90 were 20-week plus in length,<sup>61\*</sup> 201 were 10-week plus, and 9 were 6-week plus. Only 57 out of the 300 syllabuses dealt with works from before the 19th century and of the other 243 about one third were concerned principally with the 19th century.

Issues and Themes

From these surveys and the analysis of the 300 syllabuses we can focus on several issues and themes which are of special interest and which, sometimes in subtle ways, offer insights into the tensions between academic, university-determined, standards and the political commitment to egalitarianism and student-controlled workers' education many have held the W.E.A. to stand for.

i)    Modern and Contemporary Literature

Adult education students have always shown a strong interest in modern literature and we can see, from the evidence above, that this interest has been maintained if not increased. In one way, the appeal of modern and contemporary literature is surprising - the

tutors, in the majority, did not themselves study this literature when they were students at university or college. And the closely related subject of modern history is not popular in adult classes. History, in fact, gets progressively more popular the further back you go - the numbers enrolling for archaeology classes have been looked at enviously by tutors in modern and contemporary history, and by current affairs and sociology tutors!

It seems then that Richard Hoggart was right, and that many adult students continue to feel that literature- especially modern literature - will speak to their condition. The Oxford Extra-Mural Delegacy Annual Report in 1958 stated that, "this intense interest in contemporary literature undoubtedly contains an important element of concern for society".<sup>62</sup> Certainly, a review of the range and orientation of interest in the actual syllabuses corroborates this:

- a syllabus on the post-war novel states that its appeal is, "that it offers a representation of what is happening in society and helps us to understand our changing and increasingly complex society";
- a class at Wisbech looking at modern American literature is told that, "20th century American writers have been notably critical of their society" and they will be exercising a dual discipline in the course, "reading literature and looking at society through the imaginations of its writers".
- a 1971 class in Essex studied, 'The Place of the Family in the Modern Novel' by focussing on several "socially aware" novels.
- a syllabus on 'Literature since the War' states that, "the individual at odds with society is the theme running through all the works selected".

Social and political issues can, of course, be discussed in literature classes without all the student members desiring or expecting this. When I interviewed an experienced class member in Leighton Buzzard and asked her which of the various classes she had attended (including classes on the works of Marx and Freud) had been the most controversial she instanced a literature class, and said that it was her experience that "middle class people with middle class views can get very annoyed with literature classes... literature always gives the impression of being a nice interesting subject that perhaps hasn't got much to do with politics as such", and she gave an example of a member who was, "furious when literature classes were discussing social issues" and, "she thought the tutor was biased in the books he had chosen for the course".<sup>63</sup>

Any selection of authors and books for study is bound to be a particular selection and, in that sense, biased. In the 1920s and the 1930s, the 'Shawlsworthy' syllabus was a particular favourite in W.E.A. classes. By the 1960s, Shaw, Wells and Galsworthy had all but disappeared: the most frequently mentioned writer on the 300 syllabuses was D.H. Lawrence, with Hardy not far behind. The period spanned by these two writers was the one which tutors and students evidently favoured first.

Shakespeare and Dickens held a steady place, of course. but the women novelists, especially George Eliot, the Brontes, and Virginia Woolf, are mentioned more frequently than Henry James or Conrad. E.M. Forster and James Joyce are there, but George Orwell is on more syllabuses.

Although contemporary writers are widely discussed, the preference is for works that have been around for ten or fifteen years. It is rare for a class to study works written or produced in the last year or two. So that, in the 1970s, works from the late 1950s and the



1960s by Pinter, Arden, Osborne, Amis, Murdoch, Drabble, Spark, Golding, Sillitoe, and David Storey, predominate in our 300 syllabuses.

Within English Literature there is some attempt to appeal to local loyalties: 'East Anglian Men of Letters', and 'Essex Books and People' came up several times but Local Literature does not have the same relevance or appeal as Local History. Sometimes there is a notable lack of interest in local writers. John Bunyan was not studied in Bedford W.E.A. literature classes for over 12 years during the period surveyed. Some of the well-known names from Irish, Welsh and Scottish literature appeared quite regularly, though not as often, perhaps, as they should have done. There were some important gaps and omissions: Hugh MacDiarmid I saw on only two syllabuses and those were taught by a Scotswoman, R. McQuillan, and Lewis Grassie Gibbon I did not see anywhere.

One tutor felt it important to spell out the reason for the choice of 'Literature in Three Societies', "because there is a remarkable ignorance in England of all but the greatest writers of other nations". It is probably fair to say that, taking literature classes in the W.E.A. as a whole, they have done their bit to combat this ignorance but mainly through Drama which appears to be still the most international of forms with Brecht, Ibsen, Pirandello, Chekhov, Sartre, Beckett, Arthur Miller, and others appearing as frequently on the Eastern District syllabuses as any English playwright, apart from Shakespeare. On the other hand, very little poetry in translation was studied over the decade reviewed, and it was a very select group of foreign novelists, mainly from France and Russia, who appeared with any frequency. Solzhenitsyn was widely studied between 1971 and 1976 but he was virtually the only living Russian to appear on the syllabuses. Goethe, Dante, Homer, and Horace were mentioned rarely, if at all.

If literature was able to speak to the adult students' condition then it hardly needs stressing that it was a particular literature that was chosen to speak.

We began this Chapter by noting that the word literature is open to different interpretations: narrowly it means only the most valued poetry, imaginative prose and drama, or more broadly it can be used to mean almost anything written or prepared for reading, speaking or performance. The syllabuses reviewed indicate the weight of the narrower definition with the selection of writers and works falling within a definite pattern. But there have also been some significant examples of adult classes breaking new ground, extending what was a conventionally defined subject or developing a new 'subject'.

The relatively early development in adult education of media studies, popular arts courses, film studies; or literature classes which included discussion of newspapers, magazines, best-sellers and crime novels, are examples. But in the 1960s and the 1970s the initiative and the potential for developments in education in these areas seems to have passed to some universities, polytechnics and the Open University. There was obviously a point when 'science fiction' was acknowledged as a specific literature for the syllabuses, and 'TV drama', as we have seen above, began its life as a separate W.E.A. subject in the Eastern District in 1971.

The potential offered by T.V. to the study of drama and literature had been recognised well before this. The 'Pilkington Report' carried a paragraph which read:

The W.E.A. also pointed out that programmes on T.V. not designated as Further Education could also serve adult education. Not only would they stimulate and interest new people, but they could serve to complement a formal course. Thus, a series such as the Age of Kings could be used by an organised group studying Shakespearean



drama.<sup>64</sup>

Given that suggestions like this were being made, in print, in the 1950s, it is surprising that so few literature courses in the 1960s and the 1970s appeared to involve television. There were problems, of course: only the big T.V. events and series like Age of Kings were advertised well in advance. For the ordinary literature or drama class there was then the problem of planning. In 1972 I wrote to the B.B.C. and the commercial T.V. companies asking for advance information on plays, serials and drama series which were being planned for transmission during the autumn and winter, and found it impossible to get any more detailed information than that already provided in a press release (outlining a few titles of major productions) because, they said, "we are in a competitive situation".

Television - the 'goggle box' - had, as well, been held in fairly deep disdain by many tutors and adult students and this attitude hung on well after 'the box' had been accepted into the home. The 'good adult class is about reading and studying books", and although organised theatre visits have formed a wholly acceptable part of this kind of class for a long time the same did not always apply to recommended or planned viewing of the same play on television.

#### ii) The Crowded Syllabus

We have seen that it was the considered view of the W.E.A. Working Group in 1960 that many classes were attempting too much in literature courses. And G.H. Thompson had made this charge against literature classes in particular in the 1930s:

What can be said, for instance, for a class where a large number of works of a miscellaneous character are taken in the course of a session, the theme of each work being outlined by the tutor and discussed by the students? Such a course does not appear to me



to be possessed of any more continuity than the syllabus of a Literary and Debating Society...<sup>65</sup>

This charge needs consideration in some detail because the issue is closely linked to teaching method: if a syllabus is attempting to cover vast territory, taking as read a wide range of books, then we may assume that the tutor becomes lecturer willy-nilly. Or at least the sessions become very tutor-centred with most students not having read the books and able only to offer comment and judgement when the discussion becomes general.

Richard Hoggart's essays and notes on teaching literature in extra-mural classes are most valuable as a starting point for this consideration because they offer a kind of model to which we may refer for guidance and comparison. Hoggart says:

The greater part of each year's course should be spent in the study of a few carefully chosen texts. One of the many signs of an improving class in the progressive slowing of its pace from year to year. Not all works are suitable for intensive study of this kind but there are quite enough for our purposes... The speed of reading varies with each class, but in general four to six texts are sufficient for a year's work (counting several representative poems by one author as a text). One expects to spend four to six weeks over a novel, much longer over a tragedy by Shakespeare.<sup>66</sup>

And later in notes on actual class teaching, he writes:

On guided close reading it may be best to take a typical example. The class is spending, say, three or four weeks on Middlemarch. They may have read it during the summer and should certainly have read it once shortly before the class work on it begins. I've decided how I think (subject to better developments during the meetings) I might divide the weeks with this particular group, aiming to look at one, two or three major aspects each night.

I've thought how best to cope, bearing in mind the larger unity of the year's work, with general background and period. We've reached say a meeting (this will be fairly late) at which I want them to appreciate as well as they can the fullness of George Eliot's writing, when she is using all her resources to create an intensely dramatic scene full of subtle but detailed insights. I've decided to let the evening pivot on the meeting between Mr. and Mrs. Bulstrode after his disgrace (this may easily take up the whole two hours: but I usually have some supporting scenes in reserve). I ask them to read this scene, probably from where Mrs. Bulstrode starts to go round the town...<sup>67</sup>

That is a high standard to set and Hoggart's approach is one respected and shared by many experienced literature tutors. Taking these notes as guidelines, the survey of the 300 Eastern District syllabuses show, however, that a surprisingly large number are overloaded, recommending too much reading in the time available to most students - sometimes so hopelessly crowded with set texts that one wonders how the course is taught. The usual practice with these syllabuses is that they are submitted to the W.E.A. District Secretary (or the Extra-Mural Director, in the case of Joint-Committee classes) before they are duplicated for distribution to the class members and if the syllabus is found to be inadequate or unsuitable in some way it may be returned for amendment. Thus, the Secretary of the Eastern District wrote to a Part-time tutor in 1966 as follows:

Many thanks for your letter and the syllabus which you suggest for your course of 12 meetings at Luton. May I refer to the last sentence in the footnotes to the syllabus, and suggest that before it is altered in accord with the reactions of your students you yourself might well reduce the boundaries of the very extensive field of choice offered to them?

The introduction, outlining the journey, so to say, and showing



its coherence from Chaucer to Angus Wilson is essential. But therefrom and thereon, to avoid what would inevitably be indigestion were all the suggestions to be attempted, wouldn't it be better for you, and not they, now to choose four of the eleven subsequent items for your presentation and their discussion with you? Thus, you would be able to take them into somewhat deeper study than the present plan would allow... I think it would be well if you could reduce your canvas...<sup>68</sup>

Even so, some fairly indigestible plans get through. For example, a class on biography called Brief Lives with 23 texts recommended as set reading for a 12 week course. Or another 12 week course on The Victorian Novel with 13 novels set for reading and discussion; History through Literature, with 38 books in 12 weeks; a sessional class on Modern Historical Novelists with 13 substantial novels set for reading and discussion; Novels and Poems of Our Time where 'study in depth' is promised for 11 books during the 12 week course; a class on European Literature where 12 writers will be considered in the 12 weeks and the tutor indicates the method of progression in this way:

Week 3: 'Sartre - Life of Sartre - Resumee of La Nausee.'  
Discussion.

Week 4: 'Camus - Life of Camus - Resumee of The Outsider,  
Discussion.

There was a class on The Reading Public and the Novel in Victorian England dealing with 19 novels in 12 weeks and the tutor planned to take, "one or two texts each week on which I hope to concentrate and which I hope members of the class could read in advance".

These are just a selection from the 300 syllabuses. I counted 30 others where the tutor could be said to be attempting too much. Some will have been syllabuses prepared by tutors quite new to



teaching. They, understandably, will want to pack a lot in. Also, students and W.E.A. branches will want, with the tutors, to make courses look attractive on the posters and in the leaflets: a range of writers or subjects may help. In some cases the tutors are simply reproducing in method and approach, if not in content, what they experienced as lectures at university and college. But whatever the reason, the result in most cases is likely to be a course dominated by the tutor and those students who are already 'well-read', strengthening the tendency for these courses to become more middle class.

iii) Literature, Women and Feminism

'The "traditional" work acquired a slightly musty odour.  
It became identified with courses in literature and music  
for middle-class, middle-aged ladies'

Bernard Jennings, 1978<sup>69</sup>

Literature has always been more popular with women than most other W.E.A. Subjects: between the years 1909 and 1939, more men than women attended tutorial and preparatory classes in total, but over the same period more women than men attended literature classes for most years, and in every single year after 1924.<sup>70</sup> But Professor Jennings made his observation in the context of comment on W.E.A. developments since the early 1950s. He was expressing a widely held view, based on the important shift in the Association's student membership, and course provision, over these years: a decline in the proportion of working class students (mostly male) which accompanied in a fairly neatly patterned way the increases in the percentage of 'liberal arts' students in the classes. When these classes and subjects have been offered as a kind of 'consumer choice' in a rapidly growing adult education market, they seem to have had a more ready appeal to relatively highly educated (in the formal sense) adults - mainly middle class women.

So, if we ask, what creates that "slightly musty odour", then the answer is that it is mainly those middle class ladies. But there remains, obviously, a deep and lasting suspicion that the 'avenue of escape' can too easily be taken in literature (and music) classes. A feeling, perhaps, akin to that Mrs. Gaskell expressed about dinner party conversation in North and South:

These dinners were delightful; but even here Margaret's dissatisfaction found her out. Every talent, every feeling, every acquirement; nay, even every tendency towards virtue, was used up as materials for fireworks; the hidden, sacred fire, exhausted itself in sparkle and crackle. They talked about art in a merely sensuous way, dwelling on outside effects, instead of allowing themselves to learn what it has to teach. They lashed themselves up into an enthusiasm about high subjects in company, and never thought about them when they were alone; they squandered their capabilities of appreciation into a mere flow of appropriate words.<sup>71</sup>

The desire to be fashionable and to be a 'cultured person' in this way may, as Hoggart recognised, explain the motivation of some adult students in literature classes. But quite different kinds of motivation and experience are always possible. This is an account given by a member of a W.E.A. literature class in the 1970s, describing how she discovered the novels of Thomas Hardy in a class in the 1920s:

Trying to catch up on one's education after a long day at work was very difficult and I well understood my father's problem as he had left school at the age of twelve to start work. Every morning he would pore over Harmsworth's Encyclopaedia and a self-educator and together we went to a class organised by the Workers' Educational Association. I had some difficulty in that I was then a skivvy in



a one-servant household, there would be the washing up to do when I returned from my night class on my evening off which meant changing back into my maid's clothes and washing up the dirty dishes left from the supper I had prepared before leaving for the class.

But now with what joy, tired out physically but mentally alert did my dear dad and I discuss our class together over supper which mother had prepared for us, and she would additionally help us by washing up afterwards.

On one occasion when dad and I, together with other workers who had been compelled to leave school early, were attending a W.E.A. class, we discussed what books would be interesting and easy to read and would be specially suitable for those who had not read a book since leaving school. Until then I had read only popular periodicals such as Passing Show, Answers, Tit-bits, Peg's Paper and cheap novellettes - and then I was introduced to works by Thomas Hardy.

It has to be said that the weekly Punch and other publications of that kind showed cartoons depicting the servant class as stupid and 'thick' and therefore fit subjects for their jokes. The skivvy particularly was revealed as a brainless menial. Many of the working class were considered thus and Thomas Hardy wrote in Tess of the D'Urbervilles that "Labouring farm folk were personified in the newspaper press by the pitiable dummy known as Hodge..." and it was in this book that Hardy told the story of Tess, a poor working girl with an interesting character, thoughts and personality. This was the first serious novel I had read up to this time in which the heroine had not been of 'gentle birth' and wealthy, and the labouring classes as brainless automatons. This book made me feel human and even when my employers talked at me as though I wasn't there, I felt that I could take it; I knew that I could be a person



in my own right.<sup>72</sup>

'Struggling to be a person in my own right' is how many younger women have described their commitment, in their very different circumstances in the 1970s, to the women's movement, and in the syllabuses reviewed there is a noticeably strong minority which reveals the influence of a radical feminist approach to literature, and this - like the dramatic appearance of 'Children's Literature' as a new subject - is related to the growth in the number of daytime courses, with creche provision:

- a class at St. Ives in 1976 on Feminism in Literature, dealt with, "the marriage trap" and the "hell of family relationships", in Ibsen and Strindberg and "Albee's modern black American comedies (which) don't suggest that much has changed in 50 years of women's emancipation".
- a Women in 19th Century Literature class; "This year sees the 50th anniversary of the suffragette movement... our approach will give us a fresh and topical perspective".
- a Reading for Pleasure class at Kings Langley in 1974 studied the work of two women writers, "Jean Rhys from the West Indies and Doris Lessing from Rhodesia (to help the class to) explore racism as well as the oppression of women".
- a number of classes promised to look closely at the treatment of the position of women in fiction;
- a course on children's fiction embraced discussion of racism and sexism: "Should children read 'Little Black Sambo' and see pictures of mother wearing an apron?"

Many literature classes all over Britain were affected by, and contributed to, Women's Studies in the 1970s, a development which has claim to be, "the first radical issue for many years to come out of the voluntary movement of the W.E.A."<sup>73</sup> The first W.E.A. Women's

Studies Newsletter was published in April 1977, and within two years the Newsletter and Women's Studies had become a major force in W.E.A. affairs, with issues about women's education provoking some of the most intense and thoroughly argued debates at the 1979 and 1981 National Biennial Conferences of the W.E.A.. The new feminism has created something like the excitement, the ferment and the controversy that was experienced earlier in this century and the last, when some deep political and social change was taking place. Compare, for example, this account of a Day School held on 'Cup-Final' day in 1979 on Women, Past, Present and Future with the descriptions quoted above on the 1907 Summer School and Tawney's class meeting:

On a glorious sunny day in May, Stourbridge W.E.A. held a successful half-day forum on women... It was a great pleasure to welcome a large delegation from Hereford who had travelled forty miles to attend... Nan McMillan gave a thrilling account of the struggles of the suffragettes and of her own involvement in fighting the 'marriage bar' ... described the struggles for equal pay... and ended her talk with a quotation from Winfred Holtby which envisaged a non-oppressive future where a caring society treated all people equally...

Tricia Davies ... described her vision of the future as being 'mundane', unlike Utopian visions of the future such as Marge Piercy's in Woman on the Edge of Time... she hopes to see a more sharing kind of society which gives women an unfettered place in it.. We had a creche handled very capably by husbands and other male W.E.A. members who also treated us to excellent tea.<sup>74</sup>

There is a similar blending of political and social education with quotes from fiction and references to Utopian visions of the future. After Tawney's class, however - as 'Naked-Ape-conscious' readers would note - the tea and biscuits were provided by the members' wives. In 1979, we had moved just that bit nearer to Utopia.



Women's Studies cover a broad enough range of subjects and issues ("I am a woman - nothing human is alien to me"!) but literature and communications inspire a particular interest: the Newsletter has itself, after all, played a major role in creating this movement in the W.E.A.. Subjects move too, expand and are re-grouped, as a feminist literature and a feminist criticism is explored in the 1970s and the 1980s: review and discussion of 'Four centuries of Women's Poetry in England and America'; New Opportunities for Women to help widen their horizons, encourage skills of communications, discussion and discernment in reading and writing whilst exploring social themes in literature; developing women's biography and autobiography through taped interviews and encouraging features in the Newsletter like The Other Founder Member which reveals that Frances Mansbridge made a significant contribution to adult education; courses on Women in Film and video film T.V. projects created by ordinary women 'not by experts' for use in women's education classes; women's education resource and learning packs produced and sold. A new language, new methods and structures develops...

#### Writing in W.E.A. Classes

The survey of the Eastern District literature classes is also revealing in its absences and silences. In no respect was the 1919 Report more remarkably advanced and pioneering than in its treatment of the problems of adult teaching and learning, and in its recommendations on techniques and approaches. The paragraphs in the Report on 'Education in Literature' are refreshingly practical and 'down-to-earth' but also bold and imaginative:

Mere knowledge of literary history profits little. What is to be desired is the wide diffusion of taste, of critical faculty and even of creative power, such as have produced popular poetry in



the past, and find expression in the literary festivals of Wales today.<sup>75</sup>

And then decades before Basil Bernstein's work, and the worker-writers' workshops, and the wider recognition of cultural domination by the metropolis, and the need to preserve and nourish regional, provincial and local cultural development, the Report said:

But to regard education in literature primarily from the standpoint of class work is to interpret it too narrowly. The class should be the starting point for activity, individual and collective, on the part of the students. In some classes... it is the practice for the students to give dramatic performances as a conclusion to the session's work, and such experiments should become a regular feature of classes in literature. Attention should be given to the possibilities of dialect literature, not as a philological curiosity, but because dialect, where it still lives, is the natural speech of emotion, and therefore of poetry and drama. Students should be encouraged to write, and to write in their local language and with the material offered by the scenes and life which are familiar to them. If they are to love literature, and not merely to talk cleverly about it they must feel that it is... made out of the same stuff as the tragedy and comedy of their own surroundings. It is one of the misfortunes of our national life that, outside Wales and Ireland, Great Britain is unduly influenced by the culture of London, and of a very insignificant fraction of London at that... But the provincial culture of England, Wales, and Scotland, whether it be rural or industrial, is as nourishing a food for poetry as the Irish peasant life portrayed by Synge. If one function of literary education among adults, as we conceive it, is to open for the individual windows into a wider world, another and not less important is to aid the expression of that popular culture.<sup>76</sup>

The best advice to tutors continued to carry this stress, and valuable work of this kind came out of W.E.A. classes. The Ashington W.E.A. class which became the Ashington Group of painters is a famous example. And one literary work that deserves, even now, to be better known is Fred Kitchen's Brother to the Ox (1939), an exceptionally impressive autobiography which is a record of country and urban work and conditions written, from experience, by a man who was farm labourer, miner, coke-worker and navy. Fred Kitchen was encouraged to write the book in a class of the W.E.A.. And much writing was done which never got published, of course. A.J.J. Ratcliff in his book The Adult Class (1938)<sup>77</sup> writes about a literature class which ran early in the 1930s 'in a certain mining area':

Written work was abundant, though distributed very unequally. The older folk, with weak powers of expression, wrote up Logbook reports in their due turn, but otherwise only looked for illustrative passages and copied them out, or brought along relevant cuttings and books. Others, both old and young, wrote vigorously on a variety of themes. The idea-mongers wrote on problems and critical matters, the imaginative wrote poems, stories, essays, plays, a novel... The best work of all kinds came from the old man, who after seventy (during a session on drama) wrote his first play, which was very successfully acted. His novel, a leisurely regional and industrial one was published afterwards, week by week, in the local district newspaper. His critical answers gave evidence of careful research and logical thought.

But excellent too was the young woman, who threw off her hesitancy, and showed real talent in analysis of ideas, criticism, and personal essays, character sketches and stories.

A good deal of work produced was, like the old man's, published in the local press, or in periodicals, left-wing papers, and trade union



journals. And some adult students in the 1930s wrote articles, fictions and poetry for national papers, weeklies and periodicals like the Manchester Guardian, News Chronicle, The Daily Herald, Sheffield Independent, The Listener, The New Leader, and so on. Understandably, perhaps, few managed to produce, and have published, books. To Brother to the Ox we can add, Samuel McKechnie's novel, Prisoners of Circumstance, James Whittaker's autobiographical work, and the most well-known, Love on the Dole by Walter Greenwood.

Or was it understandable and inevitable that so few substantial works of writing came out of the adult education movement? Ifor Evans (who later became Professor of Literature at Queen Mary College, London University) contributed an article to The Highway in 1932 called When Will The Worker Produce His Own Literature?<sup>78</sup> in which his main contention was that the adult student is neglecting the opportunity to produce an authentic working class literature; and that the disabilities of his condition are not sufficient to justify his failure to write this literature:

There is no reason why the Tutorial Class itself, by manuscript magazines, should not begin this quest for a new literature, so that those who wish to write may get encouragement in that way.<sup>79</sup>

His article provoked a clash of opinion: the majority of correspondents feeling that he had underestimated the difficulties facing working people when they attempted to write. A Yorkshire tutor, J.R. Williams asked his readers to:

Think of Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron, Keats, Tennyson, Browning - pensioners all. Or read Wordsworth on the poet who can lie all day long on his back, receiving impressions, and imagine the difference if he had lain instead in an eighteen-inch seam, with water dripping over him, during a seven-hour shift.<sup>80</sup>

The impulse for tutors to encourage this kind of writing was, in any



case, only found in a minority of literature classes. The university and the orthodox general education tradition in literature teaching was directed more to reading and appreciating the major works from the past, with the students' writing taking the form of essays on these. And so there was always a danger that, with the 'university standards' pressure to produce obligatory written-work for Joint-Committee classes, this valuable emphasis on writing could harden into a kind of dogma about essays, especially with weaker tutors or in a situation when adult education ceased to be workers education.

This appears to have happened since the Second World War. There can be little doubt that there has been a decline both in the amount of written work done generally, and in its value and relevance. The requirement has been there, formally, for Joint-Committee classes, and in many cases that is how it has been done - a formal task to be completed (or evaded): an essay a term to be got through. Some good work gets done, of course, but in classes with a changed social composition the attitude to writing changes, with 'educated' students writing again the same kind of essays they wrote some years earlier when at College and tending to set the pace and the standard; tutors and students rationalising to each other that there is not the same need for written work now as there evidently was in earlier days. Writing is often hard work, and a loss of dynamism in 'the movement' easily leads to a weakening of the impulse in the tougher areas of teaching and learning.

In the 1970s a new emphasis on writing came from different directions: the Adult Literacy campaign; Ruskin College History Workshops and important developments in 'oral history'; community education and community publishing projects with the establishment of bookshops specialising in radical or 'alternative' publications; and a fresh, organised attempt to get working class people to write and

to publish their work.

University and W.E.A. adult education was influenced and involved: the example of the Scotland Road Writers' Workshop in Liverpool which began in September 1973 was formative, and the establishment of other workshops followed in Liverpool and elsewhere. David Evans, Lecturer in Creative Arts, Liverpool University Institute of Extension Studies, was the 'convenor/secretary' of the Scotland Road Group. He writes about all this in Adult Education for a Change, describing the achievements, the publications resulting from the workshops, the controversies, and he says:

The workshop was also able to survive because we ignored most of the rules governing orthodox evening class provision, beginning with the 'numbers game', fee-charging, rigid time-tabling, inflexible course structures, regular attendance, and political neutrality.<sup>81</sup>

A different kind of example, but also representative, is Bill Parkinson's class on working class culture in North Staffordshire in the mid-1970s where a course on novelists such as Robert Tressell, Alan Sillitoe, Barry Hines and others was followed by a course on British films on similar subjects and themes, which led to students doing two projects in their own time: the first was to study the news media, comparing I.T.V. and B.B.C. news broadcasts which led them to question seriously the 'impartial' role of the medium. The second project, a study of old films shown on television concentrated on the way in which the working class was depicted in old films.<sup>82</sup>

Meanwhile, in Hackney, the growth of Centerprise publications from the early 1970s - which had an initial focus on the Hackney People's Autobiographies - was extraordinarily creative, leading to similar initiatives elsewhere, in Bristol, Birmingham, and the North East. Seeing the need for contact and support between these growing groups, representatives from nine of them met in 1976 to form the



Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers. By 1980, the Federation comprised more than 30 member groups, with an estimated 400 writers. Many of these groups were established as adult education initiatives, often directly through the W.E.A., but no two groups did, or do, things the same. The predominant early emphasis was upon autobiographical writing, and several groups made extensive use of the cassette tape recorder, especially at the beginning of projects and typically to record conversations with older people. Transcriptions are then made and edited - increasingly by interviewees or with their collaboration - and then published. By the early 1980s the sales of publications from the various groups within the Federation had reached more than half a million.

This whole recent development of writers' groups for working class people focusses attention again upon some of our key problems.

#### Worker Writers, Politics and Culture

The aim, to involve working class people, is quite explicit and central, in the Federation but it is left to each group to decide how they should recruit members and how they should determine, or if they should determine, the social composition of the group. The book, The Republic of Letters reviews the work done, and sees it as part of an independent - and oppositional - literary culture going back to the Chartists who, "did not make, and refused to make, distinctions between the 'political' and the 'cultural'."<sup>84</sup> The new movement asserts its concern with the connections between 'politics', 'the media' and 'culture'. David Evans, in his account of the Scotland Road Writers Workshop explains:

Because of their aims and essentially democratic and collectivist style the workshops and publication groups challenge the conventional bourgeois educational provision and raise the hope (or is it



the spectre?) of a partisan approach in which the dangerous myth of a neutral yet somehow liberal pedagogy is displaced by an honest and explicit concept: the paramountcy of working class interests and needs. And, of course, they raise the question: where in all this, if anywhere, does the adult educationalist fit?<sup>85</sup>

And, where does literature come into all this? That question was asked by Liz Heron in a whole-page 'features' article in The Times Educational Supplement (13th June, 1980). The answer she received and recorded was that the principle of collective writing runs counter to the traditional notion of the individual author. It sees writing as part of a process rooted in shared experience and based on a desire to give it expression: questioning, and challenging, the traditional concepts of literature.

In The Republic of Letters much more is written about this 'collision course with Literature'. The argument is put that if the kind of literary production the Federation is engaged in were to become the norm - that is, co-operative, associative, aiming at two-way (many way) communication, cheap, widely available, producing much in order to find more 'bests' - then the conventional norm - competitive, elitist, profit-controlled, labour-dividing, separating producer from consumer - would be impossible.

Setting itself on a collision course with Literature, the Federation collided first with the Arts Council Literature Panel over a grant application for continued funding of a full-time worker for the Federation:

There is no doubt in the minds of the Committee that on a community level the work is of sound value and... a new reading public is responding to this situation. Nevertheless, ... no recommendation for grant-aid from the Literature budget can be forthcoming. The members were of one voice in judging the examples of literature submitted; they considered the whole corpus of little, if any,

solid literary merit...

Charles Osborne, Literary Director, A.C.G.B. <sup>86</sup>

When a woman active in the W.E.A.-based Women and Words group in Birmingham wrote to the Arts Council criticising that judgement and decision, the reply did nothing to deflect further collisions:

It may seem unfair to you that some people are more talented than others, and indeed it is unfair; however, it remains a fact that talent in the arts has not been handed out equally by some impeccable heavenly democrat. You are right to think that the Arts Council views itself as a patron of the arts. This is, indeed, our function. It is important that we do all we can to increase audiences for today's writers, not that we increase the number of writers. There are already too many writers chasing too few readers. Although the real writer will always emerge without coaxing, it is not so easy to encourage new readers into existence.<sup>87</sup>

But this does not really face the full Federation position which is not to state that there are no differences in standards, but that, "this body of work, this 'school' of writing has its own characteristics, excellences and shortcomings, and is beginning to develop its own standards".<sup>88</sup> A position, it may be noted, very similar to that adopted by those literature tutors Raymond Williams referred to, in the 1940s and the 1950s who, in response to pressure for the practice of 'university standards' in adult education, replied that they were trying to create new standards of a different kind of work with their working class students.

### Producing Contradictions and Tensions

The authors of The Republic of Letters frankly admit to some 'contradictions' endemic in the very success of the new movement, particularly in the sphere of alternative publishing. The basic problem



arises because:

... there is a deep distrust within the movement of anything which looks like the professionalisation of politics or cultural development - the creation of 'experts' with a vested interest in running affairs, with a propensity (to put it no stronger) to take decision-making out of the hands of the membership.<sup>89</sup>

And so there was a developing conflict between the Federation's role as employer (it appointed on a yearly basis) and its members' commitment to basic principles of trade unionism - "we would not be over-fond of jobs in other spheres with an inbuilt redundancy guillotine".<sup>90</sup> This has produced, obviously, an ambivalence and a conflict analogous to that experienced in the W.E.A. for many years between voluntarism and professionalisation.

Further, in discussions on 'Working Class Culture - What Does It Mean?' they candidly admit that, in writing the book, they found it, "extraordinarily difficult to agree on a consecutive flow of argument".<sup>91</sup> But, hesitantly, they suggest that: working class culture and popular culture is not necessarily anti-capitalist; that established cultural institutions are not simply one-way conveyor belts for a ruling class ideology, and that there is some space to work in, culturally, towards better relations of production and a different society.

Ideologically, this is a kind of W.E.A. left-wing position, and so it is quite consistent that under a heading Our Own Institutions when the early Centerprise work done in conjunction with Hackney W.E.A. branch is referred to, it is then claimed that:

In using the W.E.A., people have been responding to, and putting new life into, its traditions of self-organisation, local democracy and student control of the planning of courses.<sup>92</sup>

There were some battles, however, particularly between the Hackney W.E.A. branch and the London District W.E.A. over the relative merits



of academic qualifications and of local knowledge and informally acquired skills, for the tutor of a class.

Yet, despite the widespread connection between the W.E.A. and the new writers' movement in the 1970s, when The Republic of Letters briefly reviews the history of writing groups and workshops within working class culture, the W.E.A. is passed over whereas the Plebs League and the C.L.C. are figured as having also helped maintain a high degree of interest in science, philosophy and literature. Passed over, apart that is from the 1930s when:

... the tradition of working class education survived and in some cases even thrived, despite efforts to undermine it (for example, by the 'tutelage' of the W.E.A).<sup>93</sup>

An almost identical ideological polarisation of W.E.A. and Labour College contributions to literary culture forms the backbone to the chapter, 'Fiction as Politics: working class writing in the inter-War years' in the book Re-Writing English published in 1985, (the authors were members of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Birmingham University, at the time of researching and writing the book).

We see here, again in the 1980s, examples of that blurring of historical focus which characterised Brian Simon's too schematic Marxist history.

### The Community Arts

Greg Wilkinson of the Commonword Workshop, stating the Federation's case in a letter to Sir Roy Shaw, at the Arts Council was rather dismissive of Community Arts:

As for the Worker Writers' movement, this is not some therapeutic sideline to be nodded off to Community Arts and we find it hard to accept the whole notion of a two-tier system, implicit in Community Arts; a sort of jumble sale or bargain basement, where prices and distinctions are slashed, where everything is possible

and all mixed up as long as it's cheap.<sup>95</sup>

The distancing, and criticism made of Community Arts is interesting and controversial but from an adult education point of view the Writers' Workshops, Community Arts and Community Education all had this in common: during the 1970s these movements helped to break the rigidities of what had become (despite the 1919 Report) a barrier between the practical on the one side and the academic and appreciatory on the other.

From the late 1970s, the W.E.A. has taken a renewed interest, at national level, in the Arts and in 1980 the Association held a special Conference on the theme of 'The Arts and Working People'.<sup>96</sup> Jack Jones, former T.G.W.U. General Secretary, gave the key-note address which was followed by study-group periods on, Writers' Workshops, Film and Television, Music, Photography, Literature, Theatre, and the Visual Arts. At that Conference and subsequently the effect of discussions on these issues with the pioneering work in the communities has been to erode the artificial divisions between appreciation and practical work in all the arts.

An index of how Writers' Workshops, Community Arts and Community Education form part of a common movement which had a decisive impact upon the direction of W.E.A. work in the 1980s is provided by the Summer 1982 Number of Community Education (published by the Northern Ireland District W.E.A.)<sup>97</sup> which contains articles on The Tollcross Writers' Workshop (Edinburgh), Informal Education in Leicester (academic, practical, political); Work with the unemployed in S.E. England; and the main article on the issue of Community Education in the Open University.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### COMMUNITY EDUCATION

For a decade, from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, the word community ran like wild-fire through most Government and Local Government departments so that jobs, new developments and positions, and old institutions were defined and labelled to be 'for the community': Community Health, Community Arts, Community Politics, Community Publishing, Community Development Projects, Community Colleges, Community Education, Community Television.

In this chapter I review the major W.E.A. and University initiatives in Community Adult Education, considering especially the tensions that developed and showing points of similarity and contrast with the W.E.A.'s historic dilemmas and conflicts.

#### Key Words

The two words, workers and community are an essential starting point: Workers with its political connotations: a deliberately chosen, deliberately retained title for the W.E.A., expressive of a radical aim but challenged as a name increasingly through the 1950s and the 1960s on the grounds that the W.E.A. was no longer a Workers' Association. If, perhaps, at one of the many National Conferences when the W.E.A. debated whether to drop the Workers from the title, those seeking the change and expressing the evident unease of some in the Association about the inherited name had anticipated the response, 'OK, but give us a better name', with a strong call for the adoption of the title Community Educational Association they might, at the right moment, have won the day!

Certainly, the word community seems to carry only positive connotations (nobody can be against, feel threatened by, or even have



doubts about the 'community' can they?). The reason for the popularity of the word is not hard to seek: the desire for community is deep; Christian members of one body expressing a fundamental yearning for communion with each other as well as communion with God; a secular yearning for social wholeness; a national and international appeal for unity, cohesion and common purpose; an egalitarian desire to break down divisions of wealth and geography. It can suggest in an inoffensively persuasive way an alternative to a socially divided, fragmented and antagonistic society. It can also suggest support for existing relationships and social organisation as in a phrase like 'service to the community'.

But, of course, it is not really that simple and straight-forward. When we take specific examples, or look behind the label, the consensus begins to break: the European Economic Community; Nazis talking about 'the People's community'; a colonial usage in adult education, with a patronising emphasis on locality, relevance and popular (native) culture and organisation; an example of tokenism where the word magically evokes consensus, harmony and co-operation and seeks to take attention away from evident and irreconcilable divisions and inequalities. And then, a fashionable and positive word can quickly develop new connotations, with particular groups at least, which run counter to its general meaning. I remember attending a W.E.A. Day Conference in 1981 (on Adult Education and the Arts) where the phrase 'community arts' had developed, for opposed groups, political overtones - the 'community artists' siding with the 'workers' as radicals and iconoclasts against the 'traditional', 'middle class' art-appreciators.

### The Tradition

Professor Robert Nisbet in The Sociological Tradition and in The Quest for Community<sup>1</sup> fixes the rise of the idea of community as an

important ideal in social and political theory in the late 18th and early 19th century particularly in the German thought of the period. For Herder, Schiller and Hegel, a sense of community had existed paradigmatically in the Greek Polis, particularly in Periclean Athens. It was thought that in the polis was to be found a form of social organisation and interaction which went far beyond locality. The culture of the polis was regarded as homogenous, participatory and open to all: religion, politics, art and family life were all intertwined in a close and tightly knit fashion, and the Germans took this over-idealised image of the Greek city state as a paradigm in terms of which they could criticise the atrophied and enervated character of social life in western Europe.

Ferdinand Toennies in his influential book Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft<sup>2</sup> was preoccupied with loss of community as he saw it and he tried to work out a typology for: on the one hand, a real interacting, reciprocating community - Gemeinschaft - and on the other hand, the aggregation of individualistic, atomistic society - Gesellschaft. Toennies was expressing a contrast generally felt between the intimate face-to-face, more direct relationships of community (gemeinschaft) and the more formal, contractual, legal and abstract relationships of the state, or society (gesellschaft).

In German there is also an instructive distinction between gemeinde which means a local community in the sense of a corporate body like a local parish and gemeinschaft which carries a moral sense of community - something to work towards or transform in that locality. The gemeinschaft element is rarely absent in the Community Education philosophy we are concerned with. A clear example of this is found in the 'Seeborn Report', "A community school is one in which the facilities are to be open for use after school hours to facilitate the social development of people within the locality."<sup>3</sup>

Some notion of membership is presupposed in most discussions of community development and notions of identification, participation and democracy are also present. An article, 'Community Development in Western Europe', published in the Community Development Journal (1972) carried the following passage:

The individual citizen has ceased to have any sense of his being personally involved; he no longer feels that he is able to identify himself with any organised body... The main question then is how to promote greater flexibility in large scale institutions and to increase their systematic contact with a population or to put it differently - how to transform formal democracy so that it becomes a living democracy.<sup>4</sup> Community Education in the last two decades has often proclaimed the aim of seeking that transformation.

#### The British Tradition

The communitarian ideal has a long history - Carlyle, Ruskin, Arnold, Morris, Leavis, Eliot - and many varied people may be associated with this tradition.

"As for community", said a voice which proceeded neither from Egremont nor the stranger, "With the monasteries expired the only type we have ever had of such intercourse. There is no community in England; there is aggregation but aggregation which makes it rather a dissociating principle rather than a uniting principle... Christianity teaches us to love our neighbour, modern society acknowledges no neighbour." This is from Disraeli's novel Sybil<sup>5</sup> and a conservative tendency to look back to some time when it is felt - through romantic selective perception - that there was a community is noticeable in some of the most influential thinkers:

The old England was the England of the organic community and in what sense it was more primitive than the England that has replaced it needs



pondering. But at the moment what we have to recognise is that the organic community is gone... Its destruction in the West is the most important fact of recent history.<sup>6</sup> (Leavis and Thompson).

British communitarians have looked back to the village - the small community, rooted in the locality and, as far as possible, independent and autonomous.<sup>7\*</sup>

### Community Education

Community Education in Britain has its earliest model in Henry Morris's Village Colleges where Morris sought to generate community education for all, regardless of wealth and power (though he was more concerned with town and country divisions than class divisions). A concern for creating an organic community was at the heart of Morris's conception of the Village College:

It would take all the various vital but isolated activities in village life... and, bringing them together in relation, create a new institution for the English countryside. It would create out of discrete elements an organic whole; the vitality of the constituent elements would be preserved, and not destroyed, but the unity they would form would be a new thing...

The Village College would change the whole face of the problem of rural education. As the community centre of the neighbourhood, it would provide for the whole man, and abolish the duality of education and ordinary life. It would not only be the training ground for the art of living, but the place in which life is lived, the environment of a genuine corporate life. The dismal dispute of vocational and non-vocational education would not arise in it... The Village College will be the seat and guardian of humane public traditions in the countryside, the training ground of a rural democracy realising its social and political duties. (The Village College - A Memo (1934)).<sup>8</sup>

Morris's vision of the social synthesis and his appeal to the unifying power of education are related, and similar, to Mansbridge's idealistic vision. He was, in fact, appealing for a rural movement comparable to the W.E.A. which Morris saw as a movement of the towns and the cities:

The most vigorous and systematic popular movement for adult education, the W.E.A., is an urban movement with comparatively little influence in the villages: there is no corresponding movement for advanced higher education in the countryside.<sup>9</sup>

Morris was one of the earliest writers on education to use the term, 'community education'. Although he liked the concept of 'state education' he did not like the phrase:

It is more accurate to refer to Community Education, for we want a phrase that does justice to the fact that public education is provided by elected local authorities, and that the Board of Education is a partner in the matter... We tend to forget that local government is a cornerstone of freedom, as every dictator realises when, on getting to power, he abolishes it. (1941)<sup>10</sup>

The 'Butler Education Act' proposed, a few years later, the establishment of County Colleges (the Village College was taken as a model) and although this obligation on L.E.A.s was never pressed, some L.E.A.s developed Community Schools or Community Colleges. The philosophy of these Schools and Colleges embraced Morris's aims:

- i) the idea that adult education should be available to all sections of the community, and that through the organisation of adult education in local schools - open and welcoming at all hours - the distribution of education to all will be facilitated. (In practice, the adoption of this pattern in some L.E.A.s later owed less to a commitment to community education than to a pragmatic appreciation of the financial and administrative benefits of the dual use of premises and equipment).

ii) the aim of political and cultural democracy and autonomy at the local level;

iii) just as the Village College was an attempt to attack rural decline, so the Community School and College were later promoted as a means of combatting urban decline, particularly in the inner-cities. Thus, we can trace an interesting evolution: the W.E.A. in the towns and cities prompting Morris to try to build something comparable in the Village Colleges and then when this 'experiment' had become part of educational history and was widely known, the 'village' Community School idea was promoted as a means of arresting - or helping people to cope with - urban and inner-city decline and poverty.

#### Poverty, E.P.A.s and Community Adult Education

'I used to think I was poor. Then they told me I wasn't poor I was needy. Then they told me it was self-defeating to think of myself as needy, I was deprived. Then they told me deprived was a bad image, I was underprivileged. Then they told me, underprivileged was over-used, I was disadvantaged. I still don't have a dime, but I have a great vocabulary.' (Jules Feiffer cartoon)<sup>11</sup>

It was in the early 1960s with the re-discovery of poverty and the increasing concern and involvement in the U.S.A. with matters of human rights and equality of opportunity that the concepts of 'disadvantaged', deprived and compensatory education became major issues in the U.S.A..

Compensatory education programmes were devised and implemented for students of all ages from pre-school programmes like 'Head Start' to adult education. They were implemented in urban slum areas as well as in isolated, rural areas. The programmes included children from a wide variety of racial groups: Chinese American, Mexican American, Black American, White American, Red American etc... During the period from 1965 to 1970 more than ten billion dollars (£4,500 million) were



invested in the education of poor and minority groups in the U.S.A..

American experience in compensatory education had some impact in Britain especially after the 'Plowden Report' in 1967 with its early recommendations for Educational Priority Areas (E.P.A.s). During the late 1960s and the early 1970s there was a sustained effort in the U.K. to develop a working philosophy of school-based community education centres around the concept of compensatory education - giving priority to the 'disadvantaged' especially in the cities.

The discovery of the problem of urban deprivation led to a new vocabulary of description and need: 'pockets of deprivation', 'twilight zones', 'areas of special need', 'priority areas', the 'inner-city down-town areas', with their inhabitants being referred to as the 'disadvantaged', the 'needy', 'the under-privileged', the 'handicapped', the culturally, or linguistically, or environmentally, or educationally, 'deprived'.

The 'Plowden Committee' was heavily influenced by the 'cultural deficit' theory<sup>12</sup> prevailing in the 1960s. The positive discrimination policy of designating E.P.A.s was part of a general development (including the Urban Aid Programme, and the Community Development Projects - the C.D.P.s) which was designed to,

provide for the care of our citizens, who live in the poorest parts of our cities and towns... to arrest, insofar as it is possible by financial means, and reverse, the spiral which afflicts so many of these areas (and in which) there is a deadly quagmire of need and apathy. (The Prime Minister, 1968)<sup>13</sup>

The idea of designating E.P.A.s received a favourable response - the D.E.S. decided on five special project areas identified in terms of their proportion of low income, low status families, poor amenities in the home, high demand for free school meals and large numbers of children

with language problems. But the E.P.A. project lasted only three years, between 1968 and 1971 and cost the D.E.S. and the S.S.R.C. a mere £175,000. Thus, although there was a favourable response to the idea no extensive and coherent E.P.A. programme actually developed. The direct effects on improved resource allocation was very limited - the influence came rather from the ideas generated in the flow of reports from the E.P.A. action-research projects, ideas directed more to 'compensatory' education' than to positive discrimination in the allocation of funds.

#### The W.E.A. and the E.P.A. Project in Central Liverpool

W.E.A. involvement in Community Education was inspired by the idea of getting through to the 'disadvantaged', especially in the cities. It is not hard, of course, to see why general developments in educational theory and practice around the ideas of 'social and cultural deprivation' should have had an impact and an appeal within adult education and the W.E.A. in particular at this time. No-one could fail to be aware that adult education only reached a small section of the population. With a major new report on adult education looming in the early 1970s the W.E.A. and the other providing bodies were aware of the need to be concerned, as ever, to extend education to more working class people.

The W.E.A.s major policy statement of the late 1960s caught the mood and urged re-evaluation:

Without disparaging the achievements of many W.E.A. branches based on the community as it was ten years ago and probably increasing their class provision today and using all the fashionable titles, there should be serious enquiry as to whether their work is in touch with the new community and its present needs.

(Unfinished Business)<sup>14</sup>

The attempt to develop a working philosophy putting education in touch with 'the new community and its present needs' was closely related to the E.P.A. Programme and thinking about compensating for educational disadvantage. Many key developments in adult education in the early 1970s were deeply influenced by the 'educational priority' philosophy which had emerged at the beginning of the decade: it was a major theme in the 'Russell Report' which recommended that, "more positive effort should be directed towards the disadvantaged";<sup>15</sup> it was there in the adult literacy programme; in the deployment of L.E.A. 'out-reach' adult educators following the model of detached community workers; in the community education projects, and in the W.E.A.s own 'Russell priority' work.

The W.E.A. in Liverpool was in the vanguard of these developments: in 1967 the W.E.A. District Secretary was approached by the Principal of an evening institute in Central Liverpool with a view to joint provision of community adult education by the W.E.A., the L.E.A. and the local area Community Warden. From discussions it became clear that there was a need to give an adult educator the time and resources, "to act on behalf of adult education and be freed from the usual trammels of convention imposed by traditional methods." (David Connor, District Secretary)<sup>16</sup>

The W.E.A. West Lancs. and Cheshire District decided, in 1969, on the basis of some pilot experiments in the working class areas of the city to second a tutor-organiser to the then established E.P.A. projects with particular responsibility for research and development of working class adult education.

Tom Lovett was appointed to this post and for three years he did pioneering work which attracted national and even international interest. He wrote describing his work in The W.E.A. News in 1971, initiating an important debate (to which we shall return), and then in 1975 his book about the work was published: Adult Education, Community Development and the Working Class.<sup>17</sup>



A.H. Halsey, the National Director of the E.P.A. Research Project, wrote the Foreword to the book in which he states:

Lovett's work in the Liverpool E.P.A. project constitutes an exciting experiment in the development of adult education for the urban working class which, developed and assimilated, promises to succeed where traditional methods in my view have faltered.<sup>18</sup>

Lovett's book is a detailed account of his approach to this task and, drawing upon his field experience, he develops an argument about the way adult education can best aid the social and political development of the urban working class. He begins by quoting Freire:

There is no such thing as a 'neutral' educational process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of younger generations into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it or it becomes the 'practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and relatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. The development of an educational methodology which facilitates this process will inevitably lead to tension and conflict within society.<sup>19</sup>

In the first chapter he examines the aims of adult education at the beginning of the century, referring to Tawney and the early tutorial classes but he questions the 'myths' that have grown up around this early pioneering attempt at workers' education:

Recent research (West, 1972)... questions both the 'radical' nature of the perspective offered in such classes (Tawney would not have accepted that education could not be neutral) and the proportion of working class men and women who actually attended.<sup>20</sup>

He suggests that the early pioneering work was done with the elite of the working class, the skilled artisans, and that the educational and social aims of the W.E.A. were not truly radical when set against the approaches

of Freire and Illich whose works are quoted as sources for the methodology of the adult education approach to the E.P.A.:

The methodology advocated by Freire (and seemingly very successful in Brazil and Chile) is one that emphasises the need to start where people are, using their knowledge, their culture and objects with which they are familiar. He calls this process codification, a representation of the existential situations of the learners. It is not difficult to see how this approach has much in common with that suggested by adult educators in Western society, who insist that if adult education is to succeed with the working class it must use cultural forms familiar to those involved. It is also close to Bernstein's insistence that the culture and the background of the child should be part of his education.<sup>21</sup>

The Liverpool E.P.A. Project was one of five established: it underlined the role of the school as an agent for social change and the concept of a 'community school' was central to its philosophy but this was the only project to have a team member responsible for developing adult education. Lovett claims that the Liverpool E.P.A. Project differed too from other E.P.A. projects, and from the main theme of the 'Plowden Report', in its rejection of the notion that the problem of educational inequality could be solved by finding ways and means of widening the educational net a little further so that more working class children could reap the benefits of higher education. Idealistically, he writes,

it sought an education which would benefit all the children, not just a larger elite...

Traditional education has failed amongst this sizable proportion of the population for some of the same reasons that adult education has failed to reach them later in life. The subject matter does not stimulate any sense of involvement in the educational process. The institutional framework within which the schools operate reflects middle class norms and values. If education is seen as a matter of



coming to grips with one's own personality, background and environment, then much that is offered has little relevance and excites little enthusiasm.<sup>22</sup>

As a counter to the trend of traditional and formal adult education he lays great stress upon the informal approaches of community work with attempts to provide an educational experience rooted in the daily life and the recent events of the community as a source of knowledge, and as a means of increasing the consciousness of working class communities of the forces governing their lives. The professional 'adult educator' seeks to create and develop a 'learning network' based on the needs and interests of the community, establishing contact, identifying existing groups, assisting those groups in formulating and expressing their needs for learning and ultimately providing the resources to assist in the learning process.

Initially, the project concentrated on a period of exploration and investigation: getting to know the area and its people;

This meant becoming involved in a number of community activities which, on the surface at least, bore no relationship to adult education. Social functions, community councils, residents' associations, summer play schemes, pubs, community centres, school open-days; all provided an opportunity to make contact with local residents.<sup>23</sup>

Then, through a series of case studies, roughly chronological with the course of the project, we are led through the learning process which the author himself underwent in developing ways of approaching 'publics' outside the normal educational channels.

In the early stages, the emphasis was upon 'group work' and discussion and formal organisation was avoided as much as possible to avoid injecting, "fears of participation in a formal educational exercise."<sup>24</sup> Thus, discussions were held in a pub where a list of topics to be debated on successive Tuesday evenings was posted in the lounge bar:



Naked Apes - are we?

Life on other planets - is it possible?

Witchcraft - what is it?

Permissive Society - good or bad?

American Cities - could it happen here?

Everton - how has it changed?

and Lovett writes, "... although the opening topics were chosen with an eye to the popular press and people's natural curiosity about magic, mystery and sex, nevertheless they were to be approached in a serious educational manner."<sup>25</sup> The numbers attending these pub discussions fluctuated but a small group of eight or nine formed the core of every meeting so that:

The series of six meetings proved highly successful and a further two series were mounted. One on social problems, employment, housing, strikes, was not so successful.<sup>26</sup>

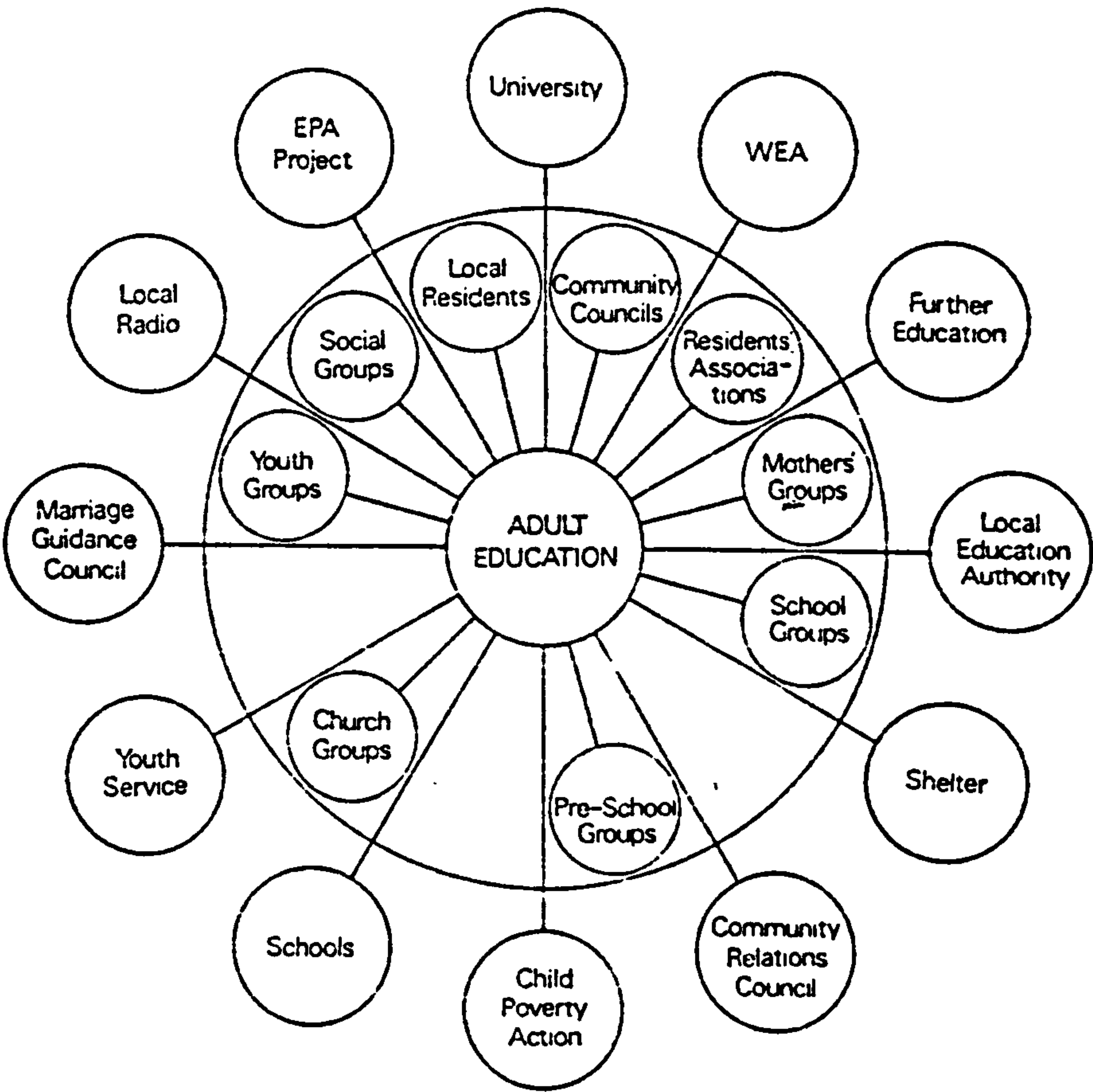
Elsewhere, the membership of the groups was recruited from the mothers of primary school children, from a weekly mothers' club, and from the active membership of a local community centre.

Later, there were more ambitious (and expensive) ventures: an experiment in kinetic theatre with a show called, 'Educational Darts', where a local theatre group helped by audience participation demonstrated the inequalities of the educational system. The show ran for four performances over two days; it was a complex operation involving a large cast and costing over £300; it attracted a total of 188 people including teachers, social workers, school managers, and parents from all the E.P.A. schools. This was followed by a successful collaboration with Radio Merseyside: a series of short radio programmes was made under the title, Living Today. Discussion groups played a major role in the production of these programmes so that, "the experiences and the views of local people" could be "reflected back to them as part of an educational

process."<sup>27</sup> The theme was the changing community, and the programmes covered such topics as, the family, the neighbourhood, the school, church, local authority and government.

The Learning Network

His experiences led Lovett to work towards and to advocate an 'organisational model':



The final phase in this Liverpool E.P.A. adult education project was one of consolidation. The aim being to maintain and develop the various positive aspects of the work, notably the learning network (a system which the adult educator had created involving contacts and relationships with the widest range of local groups and organisations).

Tom Lovett moved from Liverpool to a post as Lecturer in Community Studies at the New University of Ulster's Institute of Continuing Education in Londonderry, where he continued to develop similar kinds of work. Articles written in Northern Ireland indicate that he has continued to adopt the same kind of approach. In Derry he writes of the importance of establishing relationships and a network with the communities (Catholic and Protestant) but we should note that the work is helped in this respect because the Institute is regarded as 'neutral'.

His concept of community education and his work with the University has rested on assumptions which, as he says, were based on the results of similar work, "in other parts of Great Britain, undertaken by the W.E.A. and a number of university extra mural departments."<sup>29</sup>

### The Portsmouth Project

In the early 1970s other W.E.A. Districts had made appointments influenced by, if not similar to, the pioneering Liverpool work: in Birmingham, Bristol, London, Leeds and Luton; and established tutor-organisers in urban and inner-city areas elsewhere had their work re-defined or adapted to 'Russell Report' priorities with the informal 'net-work' model in mind.

A more ambitious project, similar in scale and type to the Liverpool E.P.A./W.E.A. work was the New Communities Project involving Southampton University, the L.E.A. and the W.E.A. in a major enterprise to extend or create 'non-formal' education on a large overspill housing estate at



Leigh Park, Havant, North East Portsmouth.

A project team of two research workers, a full-time secretary, several part-time tutors and students on placement from the universities of Surrey and Southampton, worked on the project for three and a half years from 1972 to 1976.

A full description and evaluation of the project was published in book form in 1979, under the title, Learning Networks in Adult Education - Non-formal education on a housing estate.<sup>30</sup> The authors acknowledge their indebtedness to the Liverpool E.P.A. work which had begun earlier:

We were strongly influenced by the work of Lovett and Jackson in Liverpool, who were then in the midst of their pioneering activities; these were designed to establish adult education programmes relevant to the needs of the socially deprived areas. This work and other similar activities like those of the E.P.A. teams and the C.D.P. had been widely discussed in adult education circles and led directly to our own proposal. It is important to note here that the New Communities Project, unlike many of its precursors, was not located in a deprived inner-city area. We worked on a large, publicly owned housing estate and we aimed at the under privileged majority in our society.<sup>31</sup>

The Leigh Park Housing Estate in Havant was built from 1948 and the estate came to contain 40% of Portsmouth's council housing stock. It has few amenities and, in the early 1970s it had a young population (46% under 20); most adults worked in industry on or near the estate (mainly light industry). The percentage of working mothers on the estate was exceptionally high but there were as many as 1,000 one-parent families living on the estate.

Leigh Park had been chosen for the Project because it was, "typical of areas where neither professional adult education nor the W.E.A. had

made any effect or impact."<sup>32</sup> The Project's initial assumption was:

that adult education should seek to serve the whole community and not merely those sectors of its who currently take advantage of what is provided... Although adult classes are likely to remain a minority taste, there seems no reason why this should remain an unrepresentative minority.<sup>33</sup>

and the aim of the Project was:

to increase the effective penetration of both responsible body and local authority adult education services in areas of urban overspill.<sup>34</sup>

The nature of the work, their approaches and findings were broadly similar to Lovett's: a 'breakthrough' strategy employing imaginative publicity to make contacts, public meetings to find out what the needs were; building non-formal discussion groups; the development of a single-parent family group; the foundation of a community newspaper, Leap, which was published monthly up to December 1970; a holiday play scheme, and lastly but most importantly, a project they called Focus 230, which involved conversion of a rent office (house number 230) to community education use as a work base.

Where Lovett talked about developing a learning network within working class communities, these authors prefer to call their similar method an ecological approach:

An ecological view of education emphasises the start points for any involvement as local and personal ones rooted in the immediate world of the people concerned. From these beginnings educational possibilities can grow in a divergent or branching way and lead on to creative innovation which cannot be predicted or deduced from the start and which relates to the changing needs of the people involved.<sup>35</sup>

They say, however, (unlike Tom Lovett), that there is nothing particularly new about their approach:

By concentrating on a working definition of an ecological approach to adult education, we may be accused of being carried away on a wave of idealism. Indeed, many of the principles presented compare very closely with those held by adult educators over the past century. Just as the formation of the W.E.A. in 1903 was the result of a growing concern by educators to widen the horizons of working class people intellectually and politically, so much of the present day adult education provision is equally concerned for the development of skills, intellectual pursuits and awareness of cultural heritage among its student population.<sup>36</sup>

The Portsmouth Project had direct links, as the team acknowledge, with Lovett's work in Liverpool but Keith Jackson's 'pioneering activities' in the same city at the same time (with which they also claim links) took, in fact, a somewhat different form.

Tom Lovett argued, looking back, that two broad 'models' of adult education in community action emerged from the debate and discussion around work in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. The first, which he associates with his own E.P.A. work in Liverpool, aims to exploit, "an exciting opportunity to extend the concept of adult learning to make it more relevant to the interests, needs and problems of the working class, through informal group work, G.C.E. 'O' levels, languages, keep-fit etc."<sup>37</sup> The second 'model' he associates closely with Keith Jackson and colleagues from the Institute of Extension Studies, Liverpool University in their work in Vauxhall. Here, the working class activists were, "to be given the chance to come to terms with a subject skill or field of knowledge so that they can understand its internal rules, become an expert as far as possible."<sup>38</sup> He says of Jackson and his colleagues:

Theirs is a more cautious, sceptical analysis; highly critical of the political naivety of the former and more explicitly Marxist, locating the origins of local community problems in the larger economic and social inequalities of a class society.<sup>39</sup>



## Liverpool University and 'Action Research'

In 1970 the Liverpool University Institute of Extension Studies developed, under the guidance of Keith Jackson, Lecturer in Community Development, an action-research team to work under the C.D.P. recently set up in the Vauxhall area of Liverpool. The aim was to make adult education an integral part of the Project's programme. With funding from the Home Office, which was responsible for the national C.D.P. scheme, and from the Gulbenkian Foundation, Bob Ashcroft was appointed in 1971 to a full-time action-research post attached to the Vauxhall C.D.P.. Early in 1972, Martin Yarnit began work as a Lecturer in Community Development with a large proportion of his time devoted to the Vauxhall C.D.P. and the action-research project. The team was completed in May 1973 by David Evans, whose responsibility was to be the development of local creative writing.

The Vauxhall C.D.P. helped to set up advice centres and community legal advice schemes, persuaded the City Council to create a local multi-service centre which brought together on the same premises almost all local and national state institutions operating in Vauxhall.

Within the C.D.P., however, there was a tension between two ideological positions: the conventional and majority view supporting the ideas emanating from the Home Office, put the emphasis upon improving the institutional arrangements of the welfare state to improve 'service delivery' through greater understanding of social needs and better co-ordination of central and local, official and unofficial welfare work. Accepting this as a starting point, many of the C.D.P.s decided to devote their resources to developing residents' organisational capability as a pressure group to reform local services.

The members of the action-research team had a different ideological perspective. The 'manifesto' of the team was first presented publicly

at a conference on 'Social Deprivation and Change in Education' in York in April 1972. A paper written by Ashcroft and Jackson argued that the starting point for working class educators should be the recognition that exploitation was the central feature of class society and that the purpose of education was to confront the student with his/her class position, helping them towards a critical understanding of their position.

The conflict that was latent in the action-research team's relationship with the C.D.P. was heightened and became more open in the autumn of 1972 when there was mounting concern in the local community about the Housing Finance Act, a measure shortly to come into operation. The tenants' associations voted for a rent strike and called on the C.D.P. to support them. The C.D.P. was striving to remain neutral and refused support, no longer printing tenants' leaflets on the machines in the C.D.P. offices.

Members of the action-research team became closely involved with the organisers of the rent strike after accepting an invitation from the tenants' associations to explain the implications of the Act. They knew that the conventional adult education response to such an issue would be to invite a speaker or speakers to give a neutral account of the Act. Such an approach was not, however, what the local residents wanted, "they were not asking for the passive neutrality we had conventionally considered, they were asking for an informed critique."<sup>40</sup> Their problems were immediate rent increases which were due in three weeks' time. They wanted the Act and its implementation explained to them in their own terms and from a working class standpoint so as to be better informed in their fight against it.

The meeting was held. It was called, 'A Public Discussion on the "Fair Rents" Act.' About 250 people attended. A detailed paper was presented over a period of approximately forty minutes. It carefully set the Act in its overall political context, indicated likely effects

on housing economics, illustrated basic principles of its rebate system. The paper ran to five foolscap sides and duplicated versions were available to be taken away from the meeting to be read at home or to discuss in smaller groups. In addition, several residents' groups were later addressed and it was estimated that the total number of people attending meetings was over one thousand in an area where the adult population is approximately six thousand.

Thus, through the mass meeting and the series of follow-up meetings the desired 'informed critique' produced by members of the professional adult education team was duly presented to the local community. But, they stress,

there was no attempt to distort the intentions of those politicians who promoted the Act: on the contrary, their position was presented in their own terms.<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, the meetings sparked off a substantial degree of residents' action and revived almost defunct residents' groups. Members of the action-research team helped with the production of leaflets and bulletins; acted as advisors on organisation and strategy and taught about relevant issues, such as criteria for rebates under the Act to those involved in the area.

In this work they distanced themselves from the C.D.P.: the experience of the rent strike and then the local election campaign that followed, when tenants' candidates opposed sitting Labour councillors, brought together a group of ten to fifteen with whom the team were involved in a continuing discussion about the politics of education. This group became an organised class in social theory and social problems. When Jackson and Ashcroft describe the nature of this class they make most explicit their distance from the W.E.A./E.P.A. project and the aims and methods used by Tom Lovett:

With a regular attendance of ten, this class is the hard core of a



rather larger group which will also be provided with regular opportunities for study. The level at which the material is presented has been set deliberately high. Some members of the group want to take G.C.E. 'A' levels, others to discuss issues on the basis of reading and writing. No-one wants loose informal discussions. This has made it possible to put the informal pub discussion element of 'experimental' working class education in its rightful place, despite the tendency for the press to highlight it as exotic. Certainly this class promotes pub discussion at length, on the basis of previous careful analysis, and usually stimulated by members of the class rather than by the tutor himself. But nobody has any doubts as to where the central educational contribution is being made; that is, in a more structured context than chatty discussion over a pint.<sup>42</sup>

From this group emerged a plan for a People's Centre, an independent community centre with a strong emphasis on learning activities. Ashcroft ran a series of seminars on political theory; Evans led a season's discussions of 'favourite books' which gave way to the Scotland Road Writers' Workshop; Jackson and Yarnit mounted a course leading to a Certificate in Neighbourhood Work, whose core component was a study of the rise and fall of the Port of Liverpool and its social consequences. Official funding was obtained for Jackson to lead a residents' inquiry into law and order in central Liverpool.

This was the background to the formation and launching of Second Chance to Learn - a programme which began in 1975, aimed at people active in the community or in trade unions and who have gained few or no formal qualifications since leaving school at the minimum leaving age. Second Chance to Learn is a one-day-a-week social studies course (two courses with 20 students each attending separate days) lasting twenty weeks. The day consists of a history seminar, history workshop

and writers' workshop, each ninety minutes long. In addition, each student is allocated a tutor for regular weekly meetings. Students are also expected to attend one or two week-end residential schools at the Northern College. The course is a University /W.E.A. Joint Committee course funded by the Urban Programme under the Inner Cities Partnership Scheme and housed by Liverpool Education Committee. Through the early 1980s, Second Chance education on this model continued to grow: in the Liverpool scheme more than 60 students attending one day a week for thirty weeks during school terms with, in addition, the once weekly meeting with a tutor. Second Chance became a member, along with the Liverpool W.E.A. Branch, of the Liverpool Adult Education Consortium, other members of which include the Charles Wootton Centre (the black community's education scheme) and the inner city Writers' Workshops.

Under constant threat of cutbacks the Consortium's members have created a mutual support system. We campaign together for better facilities for working class adults and co-operate in the development of courses. The Consortium has provided the impetus for city-wide Women's Studies courses... This is the context in which Second Chance has grown, drawing ideas and students from other projects and contributing to joint courses.<sup>43</sup>

By the mid-1980s, Second Chance to Learn in Liverpool had a full-time team of eight people (employed mainly by the W.E.A.): two secretaries and six tutors, while the University's Institute of Extension Studies contributed the part-time efforts of three of its staff. Again, we see a complicated pattern of W.E.A. activity and development in just one city and over one decade - and with other W.E.A. Second Chance developments flowing from this in different parts of the country. This whole Liverpool community education experience illustrates how difficult it is to generalise about 'the W.E.A.' and its work.



## The Keele University Community Education Programme

Tom Lovett had made a seemingly useful generalisation about the development of community adult education but his two 'models' do not, unfortunately, easily embrace the Keele University Department's work in this field.

The Keele Community Education Programme was distinctive and of crucial importance for these reasons:

- i) it was conceived and planned as an extension of the 'traditional' work: that is to say, the aim was stated to be to, "recruit working class students to university adult education courses."
- ii) it ran for a longer period than similar projects elsewhere and, arguably, (figures are difficult to calculate and compare) recruited more working class students for courses than other schemes.
- iii) it represented, and it was projected as, a challenge to the W.E.A.. It generated controversy and conflict between the University and the W.E.A. District and articles written by the Department Director, Roy Shaw, (generalising from the Keele and North Staffs. experience) and published in adult education journals provoked considerable controversy nationally too.
- iv) the tensions it produced internally and externally illustrate very clearly some of the fundamental problems in workers and community education.

The origin of the Keele project goes back to the final Report made by the Oxford University Extra Mural Delegacy before handing over responsibility for adult education in North Staffordshire.<sup>44\*</sup> The Report noted that the fall in the proportion of working class students had been particularly marked in this area of the country. A Gallup Survey done for Keele University in 1963 showed that despite North Staffordshire's place in the



history of adult education, 91% of working class people questioned did not know what the letters, 'W.E.A.', meant and 98% had no idea what Extra Mural Departments did.<sup>45\*</sup> Roy Shaw has written that, in this situation:

I turned to the W.E.A. as the natural organisation to re-forged the links between the University and the working class. To my surprise and disappointment, the W.E.A. reacted strongly against the proposal... After nearly nine years of living with this situation I wrote (April 1970) the article 'Adult Education and the Working Class' which was an attempt to recall the W.E.A. to its historic mission and to urge universities to help it if it did. It was a friendly and constructive challenge to the W.E.A.. The response from the W.E.A. nationally was silence; more disappointingly, the response from our local W.E.A. was also silence.

After several months' cogitation, I saw clearly that if anything was to be done in my extra mural area it would have to be done by the University independently.<sup>46</sup>

Thus began the Keele University Community Education Programme and for ten years the University worked on this project, quite independent of the W.E.A., with the aim of making special provision for the working class on the grounds that, failing this special effort, "your classes will fill up with people who already have education. More want more."<sup>47</sup> Shaw justified this independent initiative (breaking from the traditional partnership with the W.E.A. in this specific area of work) with the observation:

No-one at Keele has any personal hostility to the W.E.A. but we find it a rather ineffective organisation, particularly for working class adult education.<sup>48</sup>

A Research Assistant in Working Class Adult Education had been appointed by the University and he produced an excellent sociological survey of Silverdale and Chesterton (two communities in the borough of Newcastle-

under-Lyme). Silverdale, a mining village on the University's doorstep, was then chosen for the Department to develop adult education in the community. It was a working class village (80% of the economically active were working class")<sup>49</sup> and adult education activity had ceased in the village in 1956, with the final closure of an ailing W.E.A. branch.

In the autumn of 1970, members of the Department descended on the village and set out to make the acquaintance of Silverdale people, as individuals and groups. This preparatory work led up to a successful public meeting, after which a series of group meetings were organised.

The most significant of these had been advertised as a 'Silverdale Study-for-Action Group', which aimed to look at the problems of education, transport and the needs of a changing Silverdale community. The course began on the 11th January 1971, under the title Living in Silverdale with two tutors (one of whom was Professor Les. Fishman of the Economics Department at Keele University), and twenty five students attended the first meeting. The course ran until March and there were nine meetings. The tutors and students produced an exceptionally detailed Report, with Appendices, on the course (the Report ran to 14 pages of foolscap type, and the Appendices, a separate 18 pages).<sup>50</sup>

The course, as this summary, with quotations, will illustrate, was very relevant to the community education project:

At the first meeting, it emerged that the loss of the feeling of 'community' was the central issue (p.2). The remarkable thing about the class was that the students were the catalyst, the tutors providing the general guide. The students knew from their lives and experiences that it was the community that was central. Without having ever heard of the 'Seeborn Report' they crystallised in two and a half hours of discussion the major findings of the Report and wanted them applied to Silverdale. (p.5).

For the second session, the tutors had prepared excerpts from several standard works on community. Several dominant themes ran through the discussions and the written

material that was prepared in response to the question posed for the third meeting, 'What was there about "early" Silverdale that made the community spirit so strong?' It emerged that certain key institutions, and leading people in those institutions, played a far more important role than they do today: the headmaster... most teachers... five Methodist Chapels... a Catholic Church, a flourishing Church of England... towering village leaders from cricket, from the colliery, from political life. (p.7). The fourth and fifth sessions of the class summarised the main ongoing activities in Silverdale (p.8). There was some debate and controversy over the role and operation of the old village Community Centre. But members of the course, "felt that the class was taking on the role of 'trouble-making'..." This dilemma was resolved for the class by the sudden drop in attendance, which signalled to many that a fight over the old Community Centre would hardly help in building community spirit. (p.10). The class therefore returned to its main purpose: a questionnaire was drafted and delivered to every house in the village; members of the class visited the Borough Surveyor to discuss future plans for Silverdale for report back to the class. (p.12). The survey results were written up and assessed and the class felt completely vindicated by the survey results and the general reaction of the village to its emphasis on 'community'. (p.13).

During the same period and term, another group met in a Working Men's Club to consider problems facing the coal industry and the Union (19 attended): a group on local dialect attracted 17 people and a request for a 'Women's interest' group produced discussions on domestic architecture attended by 13 people. According to the Director, the 'breakthrough' here was not in the nature of the courses but in the percentage of working class people attending: 63%, compared with 10% in normal University independent classes and 12% in Joint Committee classes.<sup>51</sup>

Given that the Department's aim was to build sustained study courses appropriate for university adult education, these 'elementary' group meetings were followed up with three planned normal sessional classes



(24 meetings) in Silverdale beginning in the autumn of 1971 (which was acknowledged to be the 'real testing time'). These were: a Labour History course, which recruited seven students and closed after eight weeks; Local History (13 students) and Domestic Architecture (11 students) both of which ran for the full session.

.. Meanwhile, it had been recognised that the Department needed a working team to develop this work. In the autumn of 1971 the Department published a printed, 'Report to the People of Silverdale by Professor Shaw', with the title KEELE AND SILVERDALE, in which Shaw summarised the background to the development of the Silverdale initiative. He referred to the 'Living in Silverdale' course; "Professor Fishman as leader of one of the groups established a particularly close relation with the people of Silverdale as did Malcolm Clarke. Out of their group came the establishment of a Community Council." And he referred to an important new development:

You may be interested to know that this autumn, as well as developing our service to Silverdale, we shall be starting to work in other centres. A grant from the Rowntree Charitable Trust.. had enabled us to appoint for a three-year period a Field Officer, (Mrs. Marcia Pirie), to help us in the exploratory and organising stage. It was a pity that this appointment was apparently misunderstood by some people in the W.E.A..<sup>52</sup>

The new appointment had provoked a strong reaction from the W.E.A. and the controversy was aired publicly in the Evening Sentinel newspaper over the summer of 1971. Under a headline, PROTEST BY WEA OVER KEELE POST, the Sentinel made a large news item from a letter sent to the Editor by Eric Tams, the W.E.A. District Secretary, which complained that:

Recent events, of which this is the latest, make it quite impossible now to conceal the fact that all W.E.A. attempts to reach a civilised understanding with the Department... at Keele seem to have failed.

Professor Shaw's response to this charge was printed alongside and on the specific issue he wrote:

This W.E.A. failure to organise work means that, like most other universities, we have increasingly to organise it ourselves. The Field Officer appointment is part of our independent work, and has nothing to do with the W.E.A.<sup>53</sup>

The Sentinel subsequently devoted a leading article to the strained relations between the W.E.A. and Keele. The Chairman of the University Adult Education Committee then wrote commenting on the leading article, saying that: "it has been, and remains, the policy of the University to co-operate with the W.E.A. in joint courses" but the new appointment was justified because, "over the years we have developed independent courses and are now seeking particularly to do something positive about working class education."<sup>54</sup>

In view of the furore over the Field Officer appointment, there is a certain irony in the brevity of the post's existence and the reasons advanced for Mrs. Pirie's early departure from it. Seven months after starting the work, Marcia Pirie underlined in her Report to the Department Director, the difficulty of the whole approach: she confirmed from chastening experience that the working class were not interested in non-vocational adult education, least of all that provided by the University. And, in Roy Shaw's words:

Marcia Pirie and I have agreed that she as a pure organiser cannot achieve what is needed to further the aims of the project, and that what is needed is a tutor-organiser. We have therefore mutually and cordially agreed that she will leave the post at the end of August, and I shall try to persuade the Rowntree Trust to finance the appointment in her place of an organising tutor.<sup>55</sup>

In the summer of 1972, controversy about the Keele programme in Silverdale again featured in the columns of the Evening Sentinel. The Department

had published a glossy professionally printed booklet, Silverdale and Chesterton: A Study of Two Working Class Areas, by Roy Shaw and Lindon West in June 1972, which provided an 'in depth' look at the life of two communities very near to Keele. A key conclusion of the survey was that, "The world of education seems disturbingly irrelevant to the life-style and experience of these working people", and, "The vast majority in the sample regard education as irrelevant."<sup>56</sup>

The publication of this booklet was reported in the Sentinel. One week later, the paper published a long letter from Mrs. Jean Ward of Silverdale under a large headline, COLLIERY WIFE ANSWERS PROFESSOR. Mrs. Ward complained that the views expressed on the irrelevance of education to working people of Silverdale had provoked resentment. "Professor Shaw seems to have a very narrow view of education", she wrote. She referred to a recent meeting in Silverdale in the village school on secondary education which was, "crowded by anxious parents."<sup>57</sup>

On the 22nd July, the Sentinel editor referred to this controversy under a heading, 'Working Class Indifference to Education':

Professor Shaw seems to feel that a recent pamphlet... was misrepresented in the Sentinel as giving the impression that Silverdale was not interested in education. If that impression has been given, we are glad to correct it.<sup>58</sup>

In October 1972, Bill Parkinson (formerly lecturer in Literature at Bristol University) was appointed to this new post and he was given full responsibility for the Department's Community Education programme.

The work in Silverdale was developed further, immediately, with five courses (3 of more than 12 weeks' duration) running successfully in the 1972/73 session, and initiatives were consolidated in Chesterton at the same time.

The strain and the difficulties were felt quickly by the new tutor-organiser: after the first year he wrote:



We are in a dilemma. Quite naturally we want to expand the project to continue our success in other areas but moving to new areas means that we are committed to conduct the same kind of organising campaign as last year in Silverdale and Chesterton. Last year's success was the result of a continuous campaign involving a 'daily round', personal contacts, innumerable talks and meetings, visits to schools and follow-up pastoral care. All this taking five days and four evenings some weeks. The extension of the project makes it impossible to do this kind of work... We are in danger of spreading our already limited resources too thinly. The result of all this is that our student numbers sagged and most of the people who dropped out have been working class.<sup>59</sup>

Nevertheless, the Community Education Programme continued and ran throughout the decade. The following table shows in simple statistical terms the nature of the development:<sup>60</sup>

Year	'72/3	'73/4	'74/5	'75/6	'76/7	'77/8	'78/9
No. of courses:	11	14	16	16	19	14	19
Long courses:	8	8	12	4	4	3	3
Students:	99	169	270	309	258	180	223

Year	'79/80	'80/81	<u>Totals</u>
No. of courses:	11	18	138
Long courses:	1	3	46
Students:	223	261	<u>1,992</u>

- Several points can be briefly made about the Programme's development:
- i) the figures show, straight away, that there was no overall growth in the programme from 1974 and that the number of long courses declined;
  - ii) even so, some 2,000 students attended courses over these years.

How many of these were working class? No precise figures for the total programme are available. We have seen that the tutor-organiser reported a drop in the proportion of working class students after the first year, but Bill Parkinson's statement in his 1978 Report would probably hold for the whole period: "It is ... important to remember that the majority of these students are working class and have attended courses organised in communities hitherto outside the University Adult Education sector."

iii) in addition to Silverdale and Chesterton, the Community Education Programme developed courses on the Bentilee housing estate (one of the City's most deprived areas); in Knutton and Werrington in 'The Potteries', and also in nearby towns: at Walton, near Stone and in Crewe and Stafford.

iv) more than half of the courses run in several of the later years' programme were Parents' Education courses, with some Women's Education developing, especially in Crewe.

v) the programme and the courses were professionally organised and when the decision was taken (in 1975) to implement a 'rolling programme' (moving over a wider geographical area and organising work in the new communities), the work in the original communities collapsed. Thus, there were no further classes in Silverdale after 1975.

#### The Keele Controversy - Roy Shaw and the W.E.A.

In May 1962, Keele University appointed Roy Shaw as its first Director of Extra Mural Studies: a former W.E.A. tutor-organiser, a Leeds University Staff Tutor and Warden of the adult education centre at Bradford, and: "He was also well known as an explorer of new ideas, and a controversialist not uninfluenced by his leader at the Leeds Extra Mural Department, Sidney Raybould".<sup>61</sup> He certainly brought controversy with him to North Staffordshire as his years as Director were marked by a sustained critique of the W.E.A., so that when he left the Keele post to become Secretary General of the Arts Council in



1975, a writer in the autumn edition of the W.E.A. News could say - from the distance of another county - that, "the cheers which a few months ago greeted the news that 'Roy Shaw is going to the Arts Council' have probably no yet died down in 'The Potteries'".<sup>62</sup>

What was the essence of this critique, which created such a strong impact and reaction? Some hints have already been given, in the outline offered above of the Community Education Programme, but it had several components.

Firstly, in the mid-1960s he had lifted across the Pennines the 'Raybouldite' notion that university tutors should be deployed almost exclusively on long and demanding courses which were now increasingly organised by the University independently: from 1962/63 to 1968/69 the number of University independent courses grew from 1 to 87, and the number of courses jointly arranged with the W.E.A. dropped from 58 to 37. Furthermore, this was part of a shift towards the general purveying of what the Director called, 'adult education for the educated'.

Secondly, the decline of Joint Committee work and the continuing fall in the number of working class students in the courses created, he argued, a situation where the W.E.A. was failing to fulfil its traditional role and responsibility of stimulating adult education at university level among these students. Thus, "my own University has decided to make its own provision for working class students".<sup>63</sup>

Thirdly, he challenged the W.E.A. 'myths': voluntaryism, democracy and the idea of "classes emerging from below", and the claim (made by Professor Wiltshire) that the W.E.A. is the, "last bastion of non-vocational adult education".<sup>64</sup>

Fourthly, he argued that, on the contrary, the universities were the more effective providers and that they were the more 'cost-effective' too. He recommended, therefore, that the W.E.A. be deprived of Responsible Body status and the dissolution of the Joint Committees.



Finally, he was critical of the 'rather vague' writings of those involved in the Liverpool W.E.A. Community Education project which was under way when the Keele work in this field began:

They (Lovett and Jackson) gird at what they variously call 'traditional', 'formal' or 'elitist' education and plead for some alternative which is never clearly defined, but in practice seems to mean very elementary discussion groups in contemporary problems, provision of hairdressing facilities, and a "class on how to apply for an improvement grant or welfare rights".<sup>65</sup>

He rejected any call for adult education tutors to be involved in social action to meet the needs of the community:

My own view, and I think the 'University view', is that a Department of the University should not indulge in community action, let alone in local politics, but that members of the University are free to do so in a private capacity as a public service."<sup>66</sup>

At the time this intervention and critique created a turbulence and a furore which extended well beyond North Staffordshire: Professor Shaw's article, Universities and the W.E.A. - Myths and Reality,<sup>67</sup> provoked so much reaction in terms of articles and correspondence that the editor of Adult Education had the unusual task of apologising for not being able to print all the letters received on the subject.

It is interesting now to try to see the whole argument in context. And with the benefit of hindsight we can certainly, I believe, say that Michael Barratt Brown's reply in the September Adult Education, 1971, dealt very effectively with the key arguments in Shaw's case. When he wrote, justifying local voluntary organising effort:

Those of us who are tutor-organisers - W.E.A. or Extra Mural - all know that until a firm local group is founded months and years of organising work can disappear from one year to the next.<sup>68</sup>

he was predicting what, in fact, happened in the Keele project.

Another significant feature of Professor Shaw's approach was the attempt to don the mantle of Tawney and to summon the W.E.A. back to its role as a purely workers educational association. As Barratt Brown noted, however, the W.E.A. was never a purely workers educational association. Shaw seems to have been drawn, to help justify his departmental policies, to divide the adult populace into, "the 'educated' on the one hand and the great mass of those who had been fated to be early-leavers, on the other". (Cecil Scrimgeour).<sup>69</sup> But then, having in the 1960s talked approvingly of the expansion of the University's courses for the 'educated' minority, he - in 1971 - "did what must have appeared alarmingly like a U-turn"<sup>70</sup> by unilaterally appointing the Field Officer for Working Class Education and at the same time circularising local trade union branches inviting their members to enter into direct and independent arrangements with the University for the provision of courses. The latter exposed a fundamental weakness in his attack on W.E.A. 'myths' because he had failed - as Barratt Brown heavily underlined - to take full account of the large volume of work for trade unionists and industrial workers on day-release provided by the W.E.A..

The 'unilateral' appointment of the Field Officer, and later the Community Education Tutor Organiser particularly incensed the W.E.A. District Secretary, Eric Tams, who nevertheless said he sought to try to arrange meeting, through the Department, to see if the W.E.A. could help him with his difficult work but Roy Shaw, "threw a wall around him (Bill Parkinson) as far as the W.E.A. was concerned".<sup>71</sup>

### Tensions Within

The person primarily responsible for the Keele Community Education Programme from 1972 onwards was, of course, Bill Parkinson and, although he was assisted by other members of the Department with Eva Procek also having responsibilities for Community Education for several years, the

programme's achievement in various working class communities was mainly due to his initiative and work.

I interviewed Bill Parkinson in November 1982.<sup>72</sup> His commentary on the work offers an invaluable insight into the difficulties and the tensions encountered in community education. When he began the work he believed: "Adult education was the sector of education most likely to be involved in social change. That's why I came into Community Education... The idea was that the work would become an integral part of the Department."

His approach was, from the beginning, very close to Tom Lovett's whose work in Liverpool he knew about and respected. "I employed what he would call the network idea, meeting in pubs, front rooms, discussing what they felt was needed." He developed a number of courses on 'Working Class Culture', one growing out of a talk he had been invited to do on 'Pitmen's Songs' and the subsequent 12-meeting course was followed up with a similar course based on films. He found that many adults he met in these villages and communities were interested in their children's education rather than their own and so he arranged the programme of six-meeting Parents' Education courses. Large numbers attended - between 20 and 45 for each course - in Silverdale, Knutton and on the Bentilee estate. He saw all this as, "semi-political work, breaking down barriers".

Community education attracted and needed, "politically committed people" who should have then been trained and well prepared for the work. But, "we were working against the prevailing orthodoxies in adult education." The management's primary concern was to make up the hours for teaching, to get the programme, the long courses:

This is who I blame most of all - the Management in adult education. They were carried away by the fashion for community education. They never thought through the implications of their commitment: the implications for the community, for the Department, for adult education in general and the tutors in particular. 'Community' was a cant word,



and they hid behind it. They gave the impression they were doing this marvellously radical work. But when you examine their ideological position, they were just trying to extend the existing provision. We were trying to change the nature of existing provision in terms of content, form, finance, course structure. There was bound to be political tension. They saw theirs as the right method... It was like carrying a B52 air-strike on the village: load the aircraft with cultural goodies and drop them on the village. They never questioned what kind of things they were dropping... They could not think outside the orthodox political ideologies.

There was also a, "hell of a lot of tension" at the "managerial levels" between the University Department and the W.E.A.. The Director was "locked into an intellectual and ideological battle with the W.E.A.", but "I never found any conflict with W.E.A. members. I never arranged to go where the W.E.A. already was". But the pressures of work and tension were too great:

I was off work for six months in 1976 - totally exhausted. I'd been working every bloody day and night... They never accepted that that was the level of activity needed... they never countenanced failure - that's why the other people were sacked... The Department never wanted to study the conditions in which failure arose... If they did, they blamed the individual... What we were grappling with were historic cultural problems - if you didn't solve it, then that was your fault. I feel very bitter about this... An extraordinary amount of valuable work was done - in Liverpool, Bristol, Southampton, here and the other places. We were beginning a new kind of adult education... organising, teaching, content, course-materials, publicity... It was all beginning to take shape. But because it was a fashion - all the work is now just lost to adult education. In another ten or fifteen years when historical circumstances have some similarity again to the 1960s and the 1970s, we'll see another phase of Community Education...

but they won't learn from us. They'll end up in exactly the same predicament as we did... I've said all this at conferences... I don't want to appear to be criticising individuals. I think Roy was just as much a victim of his orthodoxies as I was, perhaps, of mine... He saw himself as a kind of Tawney figure.

#### A Review of Community Adult Education: 1960 - 1980

Looking back from the 1980s, with adult education now in a position of crisis and retraction, we can see that the growth of community adult education had reached its end by the late 1970s (though some developments have continued through into the 1980s). The phase, effectively begun in the 1960s, had ended within twenty years. We can now review this important area of work, for which high claims were made. What, in retrospect can we say of the achievements? Were the claims justified? In what way does a review of this work raise issues which are relevant to our general theme?

#### Education and Equality

To find a strategy for an educational road to equality! That has been a central theme of educational discussion from the beginning of the Twentieth Century.<sup>73</sup>

That sentence opens the Report on the Research Project, sponsored by the D.E.S. and the S.S.R.C., which evaluated the Plowden E.P.A. Programme. Thus, the E.P.A. Programme and the adult education initiatives linked to it, directly or indirectly, can be seen (and was seen by our main participants above) as part of that most fundamental aim.

In the same chapter, entitled, 'Political Ends and Educational Means', Dr. Halsey summarises the issues in this way:

The liberal notion of equality of opportunity dominated discussion at least until the 1950s. But it was never unchallenged by those who wrote in the tradition of R.H. Tawney and it was effectively lampooned

in Michael Young's Rise of the Meritocracy. Writers like Tawney and Raymond Williams always sought for an educational system which would be egalitarian in the much broader sense of providing a common culture... The essential judgement must be that the 'liberal' policies failed even in their own terms. The typical history of educational expansion in the 1950s and the 1960s can be represented by a graph of inequality of attainment... which has shifted markedly upwards without changing its slope... In other words, relative chances did not alter materially despite expansion.

In summary, it may be said that liberal policies failed basically on an inadequate theory of learning. They failed to notice that the major determinents of educational attainment were not school masters but social situations... So, the second phase began with its new emphasis on a theory of non-educational determination of education... The 'Plowden Report' belongs to this phase in the development of our understanding of the egalitarian issues in education and relates them to the social setting of the school. (However)... in reading the 'Plowden Report' one could hardly escape the view that equality of opportunity was, without equality of condition, a sham.<sup>74</sup>

For many working in adult and community education the aim has been to use educational means to help achieve that equality of condition. But this is inevitably controversial for three main reasons:

- i) there are those who fundamentally oppose the ends desired (greater equality);
- ii) there are those who question, whether naively or deliberately, the desirability of using educational means for political ends;
- iii) there is often deep disagreement about the value or feasibility of using different educational means towards agreed ends.

Raymond Kohn, the W.E.A. Tutor Organiser for Birmingham, faced these issues directly in a paper he wrote and presented to his W.E.A.



District Committee in 1974, based on his work in the inner ring area of the City. He called his paper, Unbegun Business<sup>75\*</sup> as he was attempting to analyse the implications of being, "seriously concerned with the problem of the educationally underprivileged"; (engaging with one of the W.E.A.'s 'Particular Responsibilities' pinpointed in Unfinished Business). He argues:

Any work that we may attempt in the inner ring areas of our major cities will be with people who are politically deprived. It may be painful for we who profess a belief in the values of liberal education to have to admit that any work with the politically deprived - no matter how 'objective' or 'purely educational' our intentions - will NECESSARILY be politically biased.

He explains this by giving an example of a meeting arranged on housing rights - the act of meeting itself necessarily involving, he argues, education in political association.

In terms of the general policy of the Association he asks what stance the W.E.A. should adopt towards social and political deprivation. Answering that there are two broad lines of advance: first, moral exhortation, as for example in paragraph 15 of Unfinished Business where it was stated that the W.E.A. can and must campaign for greater resources to be applied to the areas of greatest need on grounds of social justice: secondly, the "'more political' line" is to invoke the threat of community action without community education.

The paper is very good on the detailed issues involved in the work - the risks to the W.E.A. of unbalancing its slender resources on working in areas where it is most difficult to establish the 'movement' which is the W.E.A.'s raison d'être; the resistance the W.E.A. will meet in radical inner city work, from politicians, from the Council 'experts', and from community workers. Kohn ends his argument with a section on W.E.A. Ideology by simply advocating that the W.E.A should omit, from policy statements like Unfinished Business, the phrase,

"not committed to any specific ideology or creed". He states that, on the contrary, the W.E.A. has a "fundamental commitment to democratic ideals and values". He claims that open proclamation of this commitment would have two positive effects: it would clarify the position of the tutor (enabling him/her, and everybody else, to recognise an inevitable political involvement) and, secondly, it would assist the W.E.A.'s relationship (by means of a more forthright honesty about the nature of the work and therefore the relationship) with other bodies working in the field.

### Poverty and the Deprived

Community education projects and programmes concerned to compensate for disadvantage were bound to consider, or make assumptions about, poverty. But the focus tended to be on a particular kind of poverty - the urban and inner city poverty. John Sullivan describes the St. Pauls area of Bristol where he was working in this way:

It is a typical run-down inner city area. The housing is a mixture of working class terraced houses and larger houses which have seen better days and are now often multi-occupancy slums, often housing immigrants. Outsiders see St. Pauls as a mixture of Soho and the Gorbals, but the reality is more prosaic. Although there is a criminal and drifting population, most of the inhabitants are working people.<sup>76</sup>

It is interesting to note that whilst stressing in his article the acute problems in the area he says that there is nothing special about St. Pauls - it is typical. Tom Lovett said much the same about his territory in Liverpool:

When I write about adult education for the working class I am not concerned with the so-called educationally underprivileged. Although the work in Liverpool is in co-operation with the E.P.A. project the



title is in many respects a mere administrative convenience. I work with a number of separate working class communities most of which would resent any implication of deprivation. Some are, in fact, stable communities similar to many found throughout the country.<sup>77</sup> Bill Parkinson has said, "I never used the word, 'deprived'."<sup>78</sup> David Connors, the W.E.A. District Secretary, described his own reaction to the inner city when he initiated the work in Liverpool: "there was such extreme deprivation... you felt you must do something...". But he went on to say:

... we were done a disservice by Peter Clyne and his emphasis on the handicapped; this made it all look like a ghetto ... all the way through we wanted to avoid labelling.<sup>79</sup>

We can see how those actively involved in the field were pulled two ways: on the one hand, seeing the special needs, recognising and pressing for priorities (Bill Parkinson qualified his statement, above, by saying that the word 'deprived' could be usefully employed as a tactical means to get funds); but, on the other hand, feeling an uneasiness about labelling or discriminating too much. That wariness was necessary to avoid the real danger of slipping into the 'culture of poverty' theory, a version of which Sir Keith Joseph had expressed in his own logical appraisal of the deprivation/disadvantage debate: a view of a 'cycle of transmitted deprivation'.

The 'culture of poverty' theory was challenged and criticised, of course, but the insinuation that poverty and deprivation are a direct consequence of personally deprived inadequacy is sometimes meshed almost inextricably with the less contentious but still problematic conviction that there is a 'deprived' stratum of the working class which faces distinctive problems.

Halsey and his colleagues, for instance, find the 'culture of poverty' theory unsatisfactory and suggest in the Report<sup>80</sup> that it



can provide a convenient rationalisation for the emphasis on community action and social work rather than on employment policies and the redistribution of income. Nevertheless, three of the E.P.A. projects were addressed to areas that might be called 'down town' locations where, the inhabitants are thought of, correctly or incorrectly, as a sub-working class formed by selective migration with a distinctive set of economic, social and cultural attributes.<sup>81</sup>

And, though the dangers of transplanting American descriptions of 'poverties' to a British context are stressed in the Report, the summaries of the characteristics of the poor or sub-working class are quoted as relevant to any advanced industrial society:

The poor in these inner city areas have, "little interest in, or knowledge of, the larger society and its events; (they feel) some degree of alienation from the larger society", and, in terms of value orientation they feel a "sense of helplessness and a low sense of personal efficiency; dogmatism and authoritarianism in political ideology... low need achievement and low levels of aspiration for self.

The poor are thus seen as a stratum in society, separate from the working class;

... different not primarily because of low income but because they have been habituated to poverty and have developed a sub-culture of values adapted to these conditions which they then pass on to their children.<sup>82</sup>

But this kind of classifying and labelling is what those working in the field - Connors, Kohn, Lovett, Parkinson, and Sullivan - wanted to reject: special problems, yes, but everybody is deprived in some way; the difference is one of degree. Kohn writes in his paper:

Political deprivation is the failure to carry out EFFECTIVE DECISION MAKING in a social context. By this definition, we are all politically

deprived - but some of us are very much more so than others.<sup>83</sup>

Bill Parkinson made the distinction in this way:

I disagreed with his (Bernstein's) concept (of the 'culturally deprived'): I saw them as economically deprived but not culturally - historically there is a rich culture... this is what I constantly argued throughout the project using the work done by E.P. Thompson, Raymond Williams and Hoggart... I based my project on the belief that they were not culturally deprived.<sup>84</sup>

Or, to put the general point another way (and quoting again to indicate just how complex discussion about the 'deprived' could be):

... cultural deprivation is an inaccurate term in that no-one can be deprived of a culture which every individual possesses however different it may be from the mainstream culture. (Basil Bernstein)<sup>85</sup>

Nell Keddie said the same in the introduction to the book, Tinker, Tailor ... The Myth of Cultural Deprivation, stating that no group could be deprived of its own culture.<sup>86</sup>

This was all too much for Harold Entwistle who, in his book, Class, Culture and Education, published in 1978, pours scholarly scorn on the loose and deviant thinking among some contemporary radicals when writing about working class culture, (he refers to Nell Keddie, specifically):

...it is ludicrous to imagine that the statement, "that child is culturally deprived" means, "I have deprived him of his culture"... hitherto, political radicals have subscribed to the notion of cultural deprivation, sometimes tacitly, often explicitly.<sup>87</sup>

In support of his view, he quotes Engels on the Manchester worker, "deprived of his humanity".<sup>88</sup>

The argument is important, but it is complicated because of differing definitions, and uses of the words culture and deprived.



## Content and Form

The question of what should be taught and how it should be taught in the areas of extreme urban deprivation has been problematic and the debate around this issue has produced some interesting alliances and shifts of view.

Two writers, calling on experience from very different areas and contexts, had an important influence on the thinking and methodology of professionals working in Community Education: Paolo Freire and Basil Bernstein. Tom Lovett refers to them frequently in his book (each has more index references than any other individual).

The effect these writers had, ideologically, on the Liverpool project seems, in practice, to have been quite complicated. On the one hand, their work is quoted to underline the need - basic to the 'network-agent' approach - to start from where people are, using their knowledge, their culture and situations with which they are familiar. With this goes the crucial recognition that teacher and taught should become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. There was, however, nothing particularly new about this in adult education. Roy Shaw gave a lecture in 1974 on 'Adult Education and the Disadvantaged'<sup>89</sup> in which he pointed out that Mansbridge had said,

... 70 years ago, what Illich and Freire are now saying, and are thought to be saying something shockingly new, that in the class, "each student is a teacher, and each teacher is a student".

But when Lovett quotes Freire on the 'dialogue' between teacher and taught, he makes it seem quite literally revolutionary by following through with this comment:

In this situation, educators must adopt a position of solidarity with the workers, to have faith in them. Education is thus not a 'neutral' process for those involved but part of the process of social and political revolution.<sup>90</sup>



On the other hand, Lovett was pulled towards a relativistic position (formal classes may work with other people, but in this area and with these people they will not work) which, through giving free play to immediately expressed demands leads to an educational content that bears little relation to a process of social and political revolution.

In his chapter on Culture, Class and Communication he draws heavily on Bernstein to make some useful, but unexceptional, points - such as: a teacher should try to gain some insight into the background and culture of those he is teaching. But, despite Bernstein's objection that his 'restricted code' should not be equated with linguistic deprivation the effect of his published work on language codes was, he acknowledged, to inadvertently help those formulating concepts and categories for compensatory education. Thus, some working in Community Education, like Midwinter, suggested that because the traditional curriculum had been rejected by the working class pupils because it is irrelevant to them in their environment, a new curriculum should be worked out, more in keeping with working class traditions, concerns and interests. Lovett shows that he is well aware that Bernstein was misunderstood. Nevertheless, his position, in practice, is close to Midwinter's.

We see this clearly in the articles written for W.E.A. News in 1971 and 1972 when Lovett initiated an important debate: he argued for new priorities and approaches in the inner-city areas urging the W.E.A. to get involved in any informal classes that may be in demand like hair-dressing, keep-fit and dress-making;

hair-dressing is not just a pastime activity but was on many occasions an important factor in restoring self-confidence and helping young mothers to cope with the numerous problems they faced daily.<sup>91</sup>

The academic approach, he argued, is mostly inappropriate for working class students and, "the study in depth of a 'discipline' is not the only way to acquire knowledge".<sup>92</sup>

The point I stress here is that the informal, give-the-people-what-they-want, approach leads away from 'study' and 'disciplines' (and this may be a necessary and valuable approach) but it requires some convoluted reasoning to link hair-dressing in Liverpool with revolutionary education in Brazil (Jack Demaine questioned - in 1981 - the relevance of Freire's 'discourse' to the "sociology of education, generally."<sup>93</sup>

The 'traditional' view was put, in the W.E.A. News debate, by Wally Long, the District Secretary for the North Western District, who argued for maintaining the W.E.A.'s relationship with the universities on the grounds that,

It is because our students are involved in a serious study of a discipline that they may become more concerned about social issues in adult education.<sup>94</sup>

Keith Jackson entered this controversy very much on the side of Tom Lovett, agreeing with him that the W.E.A. and the universities had experienced 'abject failure' in the inner-cities and the need to support, strengthen and extend the work on the lines of the Liverpool project:

the quality of the teaching and the work done should have its own integrity, recognisable in other educational terms than the length of the course or university auspices.<sup>95</sup>

However, tracing the development of Keith Jackson's work in the 1970s one can see clearly the tensions; a questioning, certainly, of the liberal adult education tradition (which had "long proved virtually meaningless for the working class in the inner city"<sup>96</sup>) but also a questioning of some aspects of the Community Education approaches. For example, the early work in Vauxhall (referred to above) which led



Jackson to criticise the idea of a community orientated curriculum as developed by Midwinter and others involved in community and compensatory education. Challenging the emphasis put upon the relevant and the 'familiar' they suggest that an education for 'deprived' communities would rather do better to concentrate on the unfamiliar since any satisfactory interpretation of 'education' requires the combining of challenge to experience as well as confirmation, whilst the best in existing culture - not merely local culture - must be made available to those who want to break out of their culturally constrained and exploited position. So that:

it could be argued that working class children ought to be taken outside their neighbourhood through the application of positive discrimination so that the unfamiliar - and therefore irrelevant - become both familiar and relevant.<sup>97</sup>

To provoke Midwinter's desired 'constructive discontent' they say it is essential to see the neighbourhood "as a consequence of the total social system." It must, of necessity involve, "questioning the validity of the distribution of power, status and income within that system." Local issues are essentially manifestations of societal problems and "action leading to social change will emerge from an awareness that this is so." They could have gone on to say, of course, that societal issues are often manifestations of international problems.<sup>98</sup>

Entwistle made a strong criticism of both Midwinter and Halsey for dismissing the broader environment (outside the E.P.A.) as simply "a middle class world":

The obsession not to be found genuflecting to middle class values becomes absurd when everything outside a local community is represented in those terms. For one thing, are there not other local communities no less afflicted with social problems an awareness of which might be of help to understanding one's own? And how far are problems the



world over rooted in institutions and circumstances which are national or global in origin? ... problems of unemployment are neither generated in, nor soluble by, the local community.<sup>99</sup>

And so we come back to the importance of the study of the big issues: economics, politics, international affairs; or liberal education for a social purpose. Back to a position close, at least, to Tawney's, as Keith Jackson later recognised and acknowledged in Adult Education for a Change.<sup>100</sup>

In the same book, Martin Yarnit has some severely critical things to say about some Community Education work:

In its desperation to appeal to all the deprived categories red-lined by the 'Russell Report', adult education has frequently fallen foul of the vacuous gimmickry of much that passes for 'community education'. While the political approach of this brand of education is easily revealed as social-democratic, its superficial radicalism can be seen as an obsession with form at the expense of content....<sup>101</sup>

He describes, and argues for, the Second Chance course approach where the subjects taught and the depth to which they are studied are given primary emphasis: background preparation; reading; note producing; a planned programme of progressive study; using tutorial methods. In all these ways, Second Chance is much more akin to the Tutorial Class in the liberal adult education tradition than to Lovett's informal approach through a 'learning network':

The most unusual aspect of the Second Chance is the tutorial, a conventional teaching method in the university... A lot of tutorial time is occupied by the monthly essay and in discussing that week's history seminar.<sup>102</sup>

### Politics and the Politically Committed

John Sullivan had found that, in the St. Paul's area of Bristol, "traditional W.E.A. subjects" were not appropriate and he went on to

add:

the tension between the fairly traditional W.E.A. type of work and the community action orientation means not merely competing demands on time... They are to a large extent different types of work, using different methods and aims... The activists in community action tend to be impatient of education's long-term perspective.<sup>103</sup>

He directs attention here to an area of tension that others too have felt and commented upon. The committed tend to be impatient of those who show no interest; it is tempting to work for, and with, the like-minded; activists are naturally prone to meet other activists. Getting through to the uncommitted is the more difficult problem and they are more numerous.

Tom Lovett felt the pressure from 'progressives' who criticised his approach, "because it was not radical enough". They stressed the need for political education, raising consciousness, helping people to see the reality of their situation in power terms. He had, he says, sympathy for those who adopted this stand but he felt, "it was easy to fall into an elitist approach catering only for those who were politically motivated." He agrees that political consciousness was important but it would only be raised, "if at all" by starting with the real, the immediate and not with broad concepts and ideas.<sup>104</sup>

Another kind of pressure and tension is that referred to by Bill Parkinson in the Keele project, which also relates to our discussion on 'Content and Form'. To illustrate this further, a useful distinction can be made between the education of the working class, where the aim is to extend the provision of education to a new or wider clientele, and working class education, which is similarly concerned with the class origins of the students but, in addition, implies a type of education applicable to the working class which is different to that which is relevant to other classes. The former is usually characterised by a



reformist/liberal approach; the latter adopts an "implicit conflict model of social change." <sup>105</sup>

Both positions can appeal to, and motivate, politically committed people but they are likely, if brought together - as in the Keele project - to produce tension and conflict.

Martin Yarnit, on his different kind of work, has raised another, related, issue and states the problem this way:

Second Chance has always had to come to terms with the tension between the interest of the politically committed, who form a coherent and vocal minority of the students, and the needs of often minimally class-conscious students. We have recognised the advantages for both types of student, and for tutors from this mix, but we also hold that adult education for the working class has to offer stimulus to both the committed and the uncommitted. Many students will never identify with our outlook, but it is crucial that they should feel at ease in arguing with it. Educationalists have always laid claim to freedom of truth. We can and must do the same with a serene conscience, knowing that if we fail it won't be long before we are being vilified by some students as indoctrinators. <sup>106</sup>

From this committed position or 'outlook' then, the same big questions surface: truth, freedom and indoctrination. An openness and flexibility is advocated; the uncommitted students should feel at ease in arguing. There is, however, a further complication not touched upon by Yarnit: what happens when the committed disagree? There must be flexibility and openness there too because a broad and catholic approach, a pluralism is necessary otherwise the funds may quickly dry up! The politically committed are likely to object at least as much as the uncommitted if a political 'line' (opposed to their own) is pushed dogmatically.

Richard Taylor in his 'Socialist Critique' paper presented at the 1982 Politics of Adult Education Conference in Leeds developed this



theme:

It is from within the liberal tradition, in terms of an open-ended framework for educative work that a socialist educational model should be developed... Many socialist priorities, in fact, coincide, quite genuinely with liberal pluralist priorities...<sup>107</sup>

### Public Funding and Independence

Yarnit is stimulating and provocative on this issue too, when he argues:

The development of the modern state has opened up opportunities in education which the pioneers of the N.C.L.C. would have found hard to comprehend. As long as some of the most exciting developments are taking place with the aid of public finance, we must keep an open mind about how widely we define 'independent'. For me, the key consideration is less the source of money than the degree of autonomy. How freely can we respond to the needs expressed by 'students'? How readily can students shape educational initiatives to support their own aims? These are the questions that count.<sup>108</sup>

Yes, they are. But this is exactly the way Cole argued, as we have seen, with the N.C.L.C. in the 1920s. Yarnit is here exaggerating the differences between the adult education opportunities and restraints operating in the 1920s and the 1970s and the 1980s. In fact, the opposite could be argued: in the 1920s the W.E.A. was a strong working class movement; left-wing tutors would be supported by students and W.E.A. branch activists but most university educated tutors then had bourgeois backgrounds. In the 1960s and the 1970s the traditional W.E.A. branches were, as we have seen, more middle-class than ever previously and there was often a deep tension between the voluntary officers and members of these branches (and their elected representatives to District Committees) and the professional Tutor-organisers who were

now more likely to be from working class backgrounds, or in any case more left-wing than the students in the classes and the voluntary members.

### Professional Missionaries and Popular Democracy

The role of the professional in this kind of adult education is often debated: the utopian ideal being a popular democracy which has minimal professional support and direction. Do the professionals dilute the voluntary democratic spirit of the W.E.A.?

We have not been concerned, in this chapter with L.E.A. Community Education but it is relevant to note here that the rapid development of Community Schools and Colleges in the 1960s and 1970s did extend professionalisation in adult education. The Community Schools created in urban areas were often very large and the complexities of the management of the adult education sphere in the multi-purpose Community Schools tended to be handed over to the professionals. We can see this most clearly in the large multi-purpose 'block-buster' Community Schools. For example, the Stantonbury Campus - catering for the whole of the northern and eastern parts of the City of Milton Keynes (in the 1970s) - with school accommodation for 4,500 pupils encompassing not only educational but also recreational and welfare facilities (swimming pool, theatre, health centre, games and social area and shopping facilities): "a village where education and living merge naturally with each other."<sup>109</sup> This requires not just massive capital expenditure but financial co-operation between a variety of agencies with a host of different objectives sheltering under one umbrella of community provision. Control is not simple, but in one sense it is simply the further extension of the logic of multiple use of expensive educational facilities. Colin Fletcher's findings, as research officer, at the similar Sutton Centre (the Nottinghamshire school built around an



ice-rink right in the town's shopping precinct) suggests considerable success in attracting adult use both day and evening. But,

It is clear that the basic orientation of the large block-buster schools is towards the professional decision-maker. Several appear to have been set up without any real attempt to define local needs. The schemes are then professional in the sense that they embody the ideas and beliefs of professionals about what the community needs... Similarly, it is clear too that there is no intention to let such centres pass into community control - they clearly need intensive professional management - and participation will be in a consultative form, allowing only consumer reaction or feedback. Their very size and complexity must make them inflexible in certain respects.<sup>110</sup>

It may be argued that (contrary to the Henry Morris philosophy) these Centres further increase the sense of powerlessness in a neighbourhood by giving still more power to what Illich terms the 'disabling professionals': and an educational 'hyper-market' mentality is fostered whereby adult education is something to be packaged, set up on display and marketed - 'This is what we have, come and get it'. Once professionals are appointed they immediately have vested interests, and this can pose dilemmas for anyone concerned about exploitation: his/her career and middle class status may be dependent upon 'success' with the 'deprived', and there is the further complication;

"... the professional eyes of the adult educator are on the down people and the professional palm of the adult educator is stretched toward the up people."<sup>111</sup> And then in the pioneering W.E.A. and 'out-reach' Community Education work there is the danger of the professional being 'parachuted' in, like some latter-day missionary, to do good work, make the contacts, decide what's needed, set everything up... the real danger, in short, of paternalism.



Tom Lovett was very conscious of all this, sensitive to some of the criticism made in the past: he refers readers of his book to an article Raymond Williams wrote in Adult Education in 1961,<sup>112</sup> in which he 'rightly' criticised the paternalistic, missionary approach to adult education for the working class. Despite this, however, Lovett goes on to argue for a missionary approach: "The work did require a missionary approach - it was necessary - a professional had to do the organising work, initially at least."<sup>113</sup> He stressed, however, that in his view this did not imply paternalism.

It is hard to say that Lovett is wrong here. David Connor who played such an important part establishing the whole project, has said that so many of the things done (the pub. discussions etc.) had a real value in themselves. But they did also have longer-term objectives: a voluntary agency put him there with the aim to try to establish permanent roots in the community. This is the important question - what happens after the professional/s pull out? Bill Parkinson was blunt and self-critical on this issue:

Quite frankly, I think that was the great weakness of Community Education in the way that I practised it... It's long passed now. I can reflect on it honestly. I was like a Stakhanovite - I would go in and Superman the community... sort out all the classes. But everytime I left the community, the thing fell apart... I never solved that problem.<sup>114</sup>

Tom Lovett was similarly honest and direct in facing this basic issue:

One of the major problems that was not resolved, although it was attempted, in a network approach to adult education was the question of control. Central to the whole conception of community adult education was, not only a re-ordering of resources, but the active participation of the local people in running the system. Unfortunately time did not allow this vital aspect of the work to be developed

although an attempt was made to establish a W.E.A. branch composed of local activists and other interested residents.<sup>115</sup>

In a sharply critical review of Lovett's book published in the W.E.A. News a Trade Union Studies Tutor, Steve Jones, made this absence of planning for the long-term without the professional a fundamental criticism:

But when the Tutor-organiser has gone, what then? The chances are the whole thing will revert to what it was before. It is the larger forces in society that will change it.<sup>116</sup>

### The Larger Forces

The larger economic and political forces - the recession and the Governmental policies of public expenditure cuts - certainly halted Community Education development. Steve Jones' point in 1975, however, was that trade union education was the most promising field for W.E.A. development: it offered a working-class base from which to expand into other areas, including Community Education. That remains, in my view, a supportable position, although the 'larger forces' have weakened the trade union education base during the last decade too.

The view that the Liverpool project (and similar work elsewhere) promises to succeed where traditional methods have faltered, has not been borne out (the 'traditional method' of building voluntary democratic organisations in the communities remains a viable long-term aim). There was something 'fashionable', 'narrow' and 'superficial' about some Community Education work and evangelising. But, Bill Parkinson is too pessimistic. Important gains were made which were both valuable and worth-while at the time (as he acknowledges) and which have enabled further developments (like Second Chance work in Liverpool) and greater flexibility in other areas of work since.

I give just one example from the L.E.A. sector. The Tower

Hamlets Adult Education Institute in East London was, until the early 1970s, one of the smaller London Institutes (post-war growth in London - as elsewhere - had been greater in middle class areas) and 70% of its work was 'traditional'. Following the 'Russell Report' and change of direction in terms of methods of recruitment: "doing", in the Principal's words, "as Lovett and Jackson did";<sup>117</sup> knocking on doors, going out into the local communities, developing relationships with the people from Pakistan and Bangladesh; being flexible on 'standards' and 'liberal with the rules', the Tower Hamlets Institute became, by the early 1980s, "one of the biggest in London", and "there has been a swing to the disadvantaged" (with nearly 80% of the students in that category) and accompanying changes in the curriculum.

New approaches to course recruitment and organisation; to publicity; to pedagogy; the greater flexibility regarding practical/ appreciation subject divisions (I refer to this again in my chapter on Literature in Adult Education). All of this has been widely discussed and followed through in all kinds of areas and situations and the Community Education projects, whatever their limitations, gave impetus to these changes.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### POLITICAL COMMITMENT AND ACADEMIC NEUTRALITY - SOME THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Developing through this study we have seen tensions and contradictions between radical political and social theories and traditional educational practices; between bourgeois culture and working class culture; between Literature and ordinary writing and self-expression; between academic study and practical learning; between disciplined, long-term educational processes and informal discussions or spontaneous events. More generally, we have seen that conflicts about bias, objectivity and partisan commitment can take a form which varies and changes according to changing social and political circumstances embracing every facet of the work.

Beyond this, as part of the wider social and political history of 20th century Britain we have been concerned, implicitly at least, with broad issues on the relationship between the Labour movement and the adult education movement.

The view has been advanced, in the 1980s, that the adult education movement and the W.E.A. in particular has operated within bourgeois 'ideological parameters' and the concern for neutrality has helped to neuter the radical working class movement, thereby preventing a revolutionary consciousness in the Labour movement.

At the same time, during a period of profound change and fragmentation in the Labour movement, it has been argued that 'The Forward March of Labour Halted' at the beginning of the 1950s. Given that perspective, then the question as to the significance of that Halt on the adult education movement is quite crucial.

Related to all this is the widely accepted view that, since the middle of the century, as more and more of the British population have

had access to education at all levels, this has inevitably placed the W.E.A. in a more marginalised position - its heroic period was in the first half of the century?

Answers of a kind to these questions are given implicitly earlier but we should now try to draw the threads, from the particular histories and thematic studies, together and address these questions directly. The issues are general and theoretical but as should be evident from the method and approach adopted in this inquiry they are, in my view, not only always met in concrete and very specific historical contexts but they are best assessed from the perspective of practice: in other words, theory and practice may be separated but they should never be divorced. A central theme of my thesis suggests that the reason why the words, 'tension', 'conflict', 'complex', 'ambiguous', 'ambivalence', recur so often as people in the adult education movement talk and write about their experience is because the 'ideological parameters' are not fixed and permanent. New interpretations and re-definitions of the whole terrain take place constantly but this does not, nevertheless, mean acceptance of a collapse into total relativism. It is still meaningful to talk about objectivity, bias, neutrality, truth, liberal values, democracy and so on, provided that all the difficulties and nuances of meaning are acknowledged.

We need to follow this through, in some theoretical detail, and it is best to do this by taking several of the key themes - university standards, liberal values, education for social purpose, academic objectivity, Marxist attitudes towards objectivity and dogmatism - examining the arguments in the context of the foregoing inquiry, and then by way of comparison and contrast, surveying two recent controversies about bias in higher education and in the broadcasting media which can help place study of the specific W.E.A. tensions in an illuminating contemporary perspective.



## I. University Standards and Objectivity

For fifty years the issue of 'university standards' was discussed and debated as a matter of central concern in the W.E.A.. This is not the case now, though standards are arguably more seriously and systematically dealt with through the Association's programme of in-service training for tutors and voluntary officers and members.

It is useful to begin by quoting in full a key passage from the 'Headlam-Hobhouse' Report of 1910 because this Report was adopted as a model for the teaching aims of the Responsible Bodies for at least fifty years. In the process, I want to refer back to the tensions as they have emerged in the actual history we have reviewed, drawing out the ideological implications of the arguments.

In the session of 1909-1910, J.W. Headlam, H.M.I., and Professor L.T. Hobhouse conducted, on behalf of the Board of Education a full-scale study and inspection of selected tutorial classes. Their considered judgement on the question of standards and the kind of teaching expected in the W.E.A. was set out in this way:

We may assume that university teaching is teaching suited to adults; that it is scientific, detached and impartial in character; that it aims not so much at filling the mind of the student with facts and theories as at calling forth his own individuality and stimulating him to mental effort; that it accustoms him to the critical study of the leading authorities, with perhaps occasional references to first hand sources of information, and that it implants in his mind a standard of thoroughness and gives him a sense of the difficulty as well as of the value of truth. The student so trained learns to distinguish between what may fairly be called matter of fact and what is certainly mere matter of opinion, between the white light and the coloured. He becomes accustomed to distinguish issues, and to look at separate questions each on its own merits and without an eye to



their bearing on some cherished theory. He learns to state fairly and even sympathetically, the position of those to whose practical conclusions he is most stoutly opposed. He becomes able to examine a suggested idea, and see what comes of it, before accepting it or rejecting it.

Finally, without necessarily becoming an original student, he gains an insight into the conditions under which original research is carried on. He is able to weigh evidence, to follow and criticise argument, and put his own value on authorities.

Such a course of education involves long and severe mental discipline, and moreover, implies previous training and previous general education of a relatively wide range. Admission to membership of a University is in fact made conditional on the production of evidence of such preparation. In the classes which we have inspected this preliminary education is for the most part very inadequate, and the courses themselves, while extending over three years, have to be adapted to the conditions of a workman's life, and can therefore utilize only the leisure time of hard-worked men. The three years' course of continuous study is in itself an entirely new experience to the great majority of those who attend the classes.

These circumstances necessarily affect the amount and character of the work achieved. In point of fact, to compare the work actually done in these classes with that of an Oxford or Cambridge undergraduate is a method of doubtful value. The conditions differ, and the product is in some respects better and in others not so good. There is more maturity of mind and more grip of reality behind many of these papers. There is as a rule, naturally, less of the qualities arising out of a general literary education. If, however, the question be put whether, so far as they go, and within the limits of time and available energy the classes are conducted in the spirit which we have

described, and tend to accustom the student to the ideal of work familiar at a University, we can answer with an unhesitating affirmative; and, in particular, the treatment both of History and Economics is scientific and detached in character. As regards the standard reached, there are students whose essays compare favourably with the best academic work.<sup>1</sup>

### University Standards

The whole Report is a considered, thorough and sympathetic statement of what the phrase 'university standards in adult education' should be understood to mean. It has been accepted as such from Mansbridge<sup>2</sup> through to Dr. Raybould, who called the Report, "a classic statement of the marks of a University training".<sup>3\*</sup>

These standards, we see, can only be achieved through a three year course of continuous study, involving "long and severe mental discipline". The authors strongly approved of the policy whereby, "it is a condition of admission to the course that the student should sign an undertaking to attend regularly for three years and do paper work with equal regularity". In addition to these formal requirements, the Report also draws attention, very properly, to the importance of the quality of the teaching, the evidence of independent reading among students, and to the conduct of the class, after the formal lecture.

Leaving aside for the moment, "the spirit in which the classes are conducted"<sup>5</sup> (which is given equal emphasis) it is hard to disagree - one may think - with Raybould's view that adult students in W.E.A. classes must fulfil something like these requirements if university standards are to be achieved. After all, if the term is to be meaningful, should not the standards of work in extra-mural classes "correspond with that required for University degrees"?<sup>6</sup>



Raybould's view was, of course, challenged by colleagues within Extra-Mural Departments so that by the late 1950s, the arguments around Raybould's defence of the 'Headlam-Hobhouse' standards could be sign-posted as a major controversy within adult education.<sup>7</sup>

A summary of the arguments put against Raybould is revealing:

- i) ... it is meaningless to speak of university standards since within the university itself there is a multiplicity of standards. Instead of standards... we should speak of university quality and this cannot be measured merely, if at all, by the duration of the course of study.

(Professor Peers, reported by Roy Shaw)<sup>8\*</sup>

Raybould had, however, fully accepted (with Headlam and Hobhouse) that the quality of the university tutors and their teaching was supremely important.<sup>9\*</sup> In any case, if it is meaningless to speak of standards, because of the variation within the university, is it not also meaningless to speak of quality (for a similar reason)?

- ii) ... a fetish has been made of the forms of students effort commonly found in the university... "three" has become a mystical number... University work is what university men do.

(Professor Waller)<sup>10</sup>

But what of the students, the adult students, and their work?

Raybould's central concern is being evaded.

- iii) ... few 'serious students' still desire the tutorial class, but there are many more who desire, and who derive benefit from, contact with a university spirit.

(Maurice Bruce)<sup>11</sup>

So, we replace 'standards' with 'quality' or 'spirit'. At this abstract level, the arguments used by Raybould's opponents are so weak and evasive that one would suspect that there must be other, more fundamental,



reasons for the challenge presented. Sure enough, in full context, and when based upon recognition of the changes in society and within adult education which were forcing a re-evaluation of definitions and principles, the arguments are (as in Bruce's formulation) more substantial.

Tawney had anticipated what was happening: more people wanted adult education, but they wanted less of it.<sup>12</sup> After the Second World War, adult education expanded with many more teaching staff in the employ of the university extra-mural departments and the W.E.A.. Yet, although in the pre-War decade 20% of W.E.A. students were in tutorial classes, in the post-War decade the percentage had dropped to 13% (and in 1956/1957 the actual number of students in tutorial classes was less than the number in classes in 1938/1939).<sup>13</sup> This was part of the problem.

The other crucial change was the steady decline in the percentage of manual workers in W.E.A. classes (down to 16% in 1956)<sup>14</sup> which had taken place during the years of improved educational standards generally. So, by the early 1950s those actively concerned about university standards were facing a dilemma: Mansbridge's confident claim that W.E.A. students had "devised for themselves regulations which are of greater severity than any which a university would have devised of asking them to frame"<sup>15</sup> could no longer carry conviction. Times had changed, and it could now be said that the words, " 'severe' and 'discipline' are not music in the ears of teachers whose students are free (in Lenin's phrase) to vote with their feet".<sup>16</sup>

Thus, at the level of argument about 'university standards' Raybould deals forthrightly and convincingly<sup>17</sup> with the rationalisations and dubious reasoning of his opponents but the challenge he faced - and it was his awareness of this which provoked his interventions - was the fact that the working class movement, and the W.E.A. and its

students, were not developing and responding in the way the pioneers had hoped and anticipated.

This opened up a deep tension, which had really been there from the beginning, and which centres upon the issue of whether the Tutorial Classes Movement was ever likely to appeal to more than a minority of the working class: in short, the issue of elitism.<sup>18\*</sup> In his time, Mansbridge could hold both the belief that they were "making this University education accessible to those who desire it among the working class"<sup>19</sup> and the conviction that the W.E.A. would become a mass movement through steadily multiplying classes.

We saw too that Tawney felt the strain of trying to hold on to the formal commitment to tutorial classes whilst recognising that a declining proportion of working class students was, in fact, desiring university adult education of that kind.

G.D.H. Cole and Raymond Williams offered a different perspective on 'university standards': they were more concerned, as we have seen, about the threat that the university connection generally presented to the radical, egalitarian commitments of the Labour movement and the W.E.A..

I drew attention in my chapter in Community Education to the way in which the 'social purpose' objective led W.E.A. and university adult educators in the field in the 1970s to set aside completely - in this sphere at least - concern for 'university standards'.

### The Liberal Approach

A central aim of the W.E.A. has been to provide a liberal education for its members, and this is assumed implicitly in the Headlam-Hobhouse' Report.

A liberal education may be defined as fulfilling, "the disinterested desire for knowledge for its own sake"<sup>20</sup> or teaching and learning that

which is worthwhile in itself. The idea goes back to Aristotle who remarked:

... in education it makes all the difference why a man does or learns anything; if he studies it for the sake of his own development or with a view to excellence then it is liberal.<sup>21</sup>

It is a deceptively simple idea, which has been the cause of some misunderstanding and confusion. For example, because a liberal education has been advocated as an end in itself and not undertaken for the sake of results (financial, moral, social, political or whatever) it is a mistake to assume that it does not have any results. Some critics of the W.E.A.'s approach to adult education have, as we have seen, made this crucial mistake.

More fundamental and crucial still is the need to understand that the concept of liberal education itself carries with it under-pinning assumptions about the nature of knowledge, reality and the quest for truth, and the aims of education. Paul Hirst has summarised the value and the justification which has been given to this concept:

First, such an education is based upon what is true and not on uncertain opinions and beliefs or temporary values. It therefore has a finality which no other form of education has. Secondly, knowledge itself being a distinctive human virtue, liberal education has a value for the person as the fulfilment of the mind, a value which has nothing to do with utilitarian or vocational considerations. Thirdly, because of the significance of knowledge in the determination of the good life as a whole, liberal education is essential to man's understanding of how he ought to live, both individually and socially.<sup>22</sup>

Let us consider each of these value-judgements separately:



i) Education and Truth

On a huge hill,  
Cragged and steep, Truth stands, and hee that will  
Reach her, about must, and about must goe;  
And what the hill's suddenness resists, winne so.

John Donne.

The notion that education is based upon extending knowledge of what is true has been fundamental to the thought of many from the Greeks, through St. Augustine and Rousseau to modern times, but Headlam and Hobhouse were certainly justified in stressing the importance of giving the student "a sense of the difficulty as well as the value of truth". For the conviction that a particular education is "based on what is true" implies a unified picture of the mind and its relation to objective reality. A real difficulty occurs when there is disagreement, or even no consensus of opinion, about the nature of this relationship. As Hirst says:

A liberal education in the pursuit of knowledge is, therefore, seeking the development of the mind according to what is quite external to it, the structure and pattern of reality. But if once there is any serious questioning of this relationship between mind, knowledge and reality, the whole harmonious structure is liable to disintegrate.<sup>23</sup>

Throughout the history of the W.E.A. there has been a questioning of this relationship which is why arguments around the concept of objectivity are so important.

ii) Education for Personal Fulfilment

From earliest times the notion of liberal education has been linked with the aim of promoting personal growth and development through the fulfilment of the mind: as Headlam and Hobhouse put it, encouraging the personal growth of the students by, "calling forth his own personality and stimulating him to mental effort". It is

particularly important to underline, however, that every attempt to foster personal development in this way involves judgement and choice with the teacher inevitably (for this is the nature of teaching) having some sense of direction. In other words, although a liberal education may be described as fulfilling the "disinterested desire for knowledge for its own sake", it is not - and never can be - absolutely neutral. This paradox is clear when we read Newman's famous view of liberal education:

He (the university student) apprehends the great outlines of knowledge, the principles on which it rests, the scale of its parts, its lights and shades, its great points and its little, as he otherwise cannot apprehend them. Hence it is that this education is called 'liberal'. A habit of mind is formed which lasts through life, of which the attributes are freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation, and wisdom.<sup>24</sup>

Freedom, calmness, moderation... Newman quite evidently has a commitment to a particular set of values which have political overtones and he has a desire to cultivate a certain approach to life through that 'habit of mind' which a liberal education develops. In addition, there is more than a hint that liberal education involves presenting the student with some sense of the structure of knowledge, its 'forms',<sup>25</sup> and disciplines.

### iii) The Individual and the Social

There are echoes of that Newman passage in Tawney when, late in his career, he offered his view on what, at root, education is about:

Education as I see it, though it is much else as well, is partly at least, the process by which we transcend the barriers of our isolated personalities, and become partners in a universe of interests which we share with our fellow men, living and dead alike. No-one



can be fully at home in the world unless, through some acquaintance with literature and art, the history of society, the revelations of science, he has seen enough of the triumphs and tragedies of mankind to realise the heights to which human nature can rise and the depths to which it can sink.<sup>26</sup>

But now the emphasis has moved more explicitly to a liberal education which, "illuminates man as a social rather than a solitary human being".<sup>27</sup>

Personal development and social awareness - understanding how man ought to live, both individually and socially: these have rarely been wholly separate and distinct within liberal education. Some critics of the W.E.A.'s commitment to a liberal adult education have sought - against the weight of actual historical experience, as we have seen - to force and overplay a separation between the personal and the social in education.

#### Education for Social Purpose

The idea that education should prepare people for society is as old, at least, as the idea of liberal education and there has long been an awareness of the need to educate citizens to be members of society. Milton's was an early English voice making a ringing declaration in favour of education for citizenship:

I call therefore a complete and generous education that which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully and magnaminously all the offices both private and public of peace and war.<sup>28</sup>

But the ideal of an educated, participating democracy - education for social purpose in the W.E.A. sense - has its origins in the late 19th century. Industrialisation, the extension of the franchise, the growth of the Labour movement, the 19th century adult education movements and institutions, the thought and writings of people as diverse as J.S. Mill, Newman, Ruskin, Herbert Spencer - all contributed to create



a climate in which adult education was to have the social purpose of helping to create a mature and educated citizenship in a democratic society. Headlam and Hobhouse do not refer to this directly in their Report but the idea of informed democratic debate is at the back of their minds when they write about the need to teach adults to distinguish between fact and opinion, to examine ideas critically, and to weigh opposing arguments carefully. Since the W.E.A. was founded, this purpose has rarely been absent from any formal or informal statement of aims. It is there in the Statement of Policy, appended to the Constitution: adult education is valued:

... not only as a means of developing individual character and capacity, but as a preparation for the exercise of social rights and responsibilities.<sup>29</sup>

It is under-written in the famous 1919 Ministry of Reconstruction Report:

By education we mean all the deliberate efforts by which men and women attempt to satisfy their thirst for knowledge, to equip themselves for their responsibilities as citizens and members of society.<sup>30</sup>

It has the advantage, as a goal, of being sufficiently general to cover widely differing aims so that, whilst the authority of Cardinal Newman could be marshalled for support and some of the most eloquent statements in favour of this view of adult education have come from Conservatives,<sup>31\*</sup> we have seen how others could identify social purpose with socialist purpose. The extent to which they could do so effectively and in good faith has been explored. The controversy about whether that socialist political commitment has been at odds with intellectual disinterestedness and academic integrity has been examined from different thematic and individual perspectives.

There has been controversy of a different nature about social purpose which relates to 'university standards' and the liberal education tradition. Within university adult education, the traditional commitment to social purpose was no longer so deeply felt after the Second World War: that was the view expressed in Harold Wiltshire's seminal article, The Great Tradition in University Adult Education, published in the Autumn of 1956.<sup>32</sup>

Professor Wiltshire's argument was that the 'Great Tradition' was, in the 1950s, in conflict with a New Policy in university adult education. He distinguished five characteristics of adult education in the great tradition of which probably the two most important are the commitment to a liberal education and the concern for social purpose, ("learning as a means of understanding the great issues of life... its typical student is the reflective citizen").<sup>33</sup> These are his first two characteristics and the remaining three, though distinct and vital in their own ways, are deeply related to this commitment and concern: the non-vocational attitude; democratic notions about equality... the only selection being self-selection; the Socratic method in teaching.

The New Policy, he argued, was replacing these commitments with aims linked to 'professionalisation', wider social and educational changes, technical and managerial needs as well as changes within the universities themselves. Thus, a new principle had taken hold, that any kind of educational provision which is proper to a university is ipso facto proper to its extra-mural department, and there was a new willingness to provide courses for vocational groups, serving - or helping to qualify people for membership of - the professional middle class.

Professor Wiltshire's article provoked a great controversy which had, of course, political overtones: the argument went on in the pages of Adult Education for twelve months, and in conferences, meetings and informal discussions concurrently, and for much longer. He had obviously



been sensitive to a deep tension that had been widely felt within adult education during the early 1950s and his admirably clear expression of the conflict opened it out for general debate, enabling others to see, and give their views on, the changes taking place.

Take this conflict about the Great Tradition with the arguments around 'university standards', consider that the W.E.A. General Secretary felt impelled to sub-title his book on adult education (published in 1952), *Why this Apathy?*<sup>34</sup>, measure Raymond Williams' reflections on the change he felt had taken place within university adult education during the 1950s (Chapter One), and it is pretty evident that the 1950s were a watershed for the adult education movement - the decade when the W.E.A. became 'middle class', when it lost its social purpose, when it ceased to be a 'movement'. Almost, but not quite. Harold Wiltshire is again an authority and a guide. He wrote a paper in the early 1970s for the East Midland District of the W.E.A. on Education for Social Purpose<sup>35</sup> in which he acknowledged that in the W.E.A. too, many members had now rejected the aim of education for social purpose: "... they would claim that education is an end in itself and needs no further justification".<sup>36</sup> Many, but not all. Anticipating the 'Russell Report', he sides with the minority in the W.E.A. holding on to a vision of social purpose, claims it would be suicidal for the W.E.A. to abandon this purpose, and recommends its revival under two headings - the 'Social Objective' and the 'Remedial Objective'.

He identifies three kinds of social purpose which the W.E.A. has traditionally served:

- a) education for community or society membership;
- b) remedial education - offsetting the 'bias of our educational system'.;
- c) propagandist work, campaigning for improvements in education.



The third he ignores (no longer, he claims, does the W.E.A. have influence as an agency of educational reform), but his paragraphs on social and remedial objectives are very interesting and germane. On the social objective he says he can see no escape - if the W.E.A. is to continue as a distinctive organisation providing education for social purpose - from the conclusion that it will have to concentrate its provisions upon socially orientated subjects and courses. Given the aim, that is not a contentious view but his observations upon 'subjects' and their educational and social implications do, I think, expose an ambiguity and a tension between the liberal approach and the social purpose commitment. "I am not impressed" he writes, "by the argument that any subject can be so socially orientated". Only "certain aspects of Literature" are relevant to the social objective, and:

Few musicians or physicists are willing or able to explore the social implications of their subjects... Nor am I impressed by the argument that any subject will make a person a better man and therefore a better citizen. Unfortunately, the evidence seems to suggest that a person may be very sensitive in his response to the arts, yet quite callous and insensitive to the people around him. <sup>37</sup>

Contrast those sentences with Tawney's (above):

No-one can be fully at home in the world unless, through some acquaintance with literature and art... he has seen enough of the triumphs and tragedies of mankind.

What this contrast shows is a tension between commitment to the 'humane and liberal studies' and a particular emphasis within the Great Tradition which seeks, rather too rigidly, to define social purpose in relation to subjects and curriculum.

I dealt with this theme in my chapter on Literature and the W.E.A. where we saw the nature of the difficulty as it has emerged in different contexts. Consider this sentence: "Unfortunately, the evidence suggests

that a person may study economics for years and yet be quite callous and insensitive to the people around him". Is not that as true as Wiltshire's statement about the arts? What has happened here is that Professor Wiltshire has confused two issues (through his urgent and necessary desire to revive and strengthen the W.E.A.'s commitment to social and political education):

i) the more instrumental aim of providing education and knowledge about social and political affairs; understanding society and its workings; encouraging informed participation in government at all levels. Some subjects, within the humane and liberal studies, are obviously more directly relevant than others in fulfilling this aim.

ii) the liberal education aim of seeking to raise people above prejudice, educating them to be more rational, less callous, more sensitive - making better people and, therefore, better citizens.

The latter expresses a social purpose too (Wiltshire's choice of these phrases to argue his case for i) underlines the point) and this broader, more utopian, social purpose is often the ultimate aim of those proclaiming the need for i). It is hard to say, with this aim in mind, that philosophy, science, literature and the arts are less relevant and important than economics, politics, and international affairs.

It does need to be said, in agreement with Professor Wiltshire, however, that some subjects and fields of study within adult education generally are more socially orientated or do offer more potential for the liberal approach than others. Attempts to argue that courses in 'cake decorating', 'car maintenance or learning about 'designs in crochet' offer broad scope for social and political education or even for liberal education are not convincing.<sup>38</sup>

On the Remedial Objective, Wiltshire was concerned about education for the minimally educated and he called for the re-establishment of



study skills and interests. But, in order to gain, more effectively the support of this sector of society ("where there is little social support for non-vocational education")<sup>39</sup> he advocated a paper qualification of 'O' level G.C.E.. The 'Russell Report' set the W.E.A. the priority of tackling the education of the socially and educationally disadvantaged, and by the mid-1970s the development of community education was at its peak - as we have seen - with the W.E.A. extending the experimental work as Wiltshire advocated.

### Academic Objectivity

The ideological core of the 'Headleam-Hobhouse' Report is found in their characterisation of the "spirit in which the classes are conducted", teaching and learning which is, "scientific, detached and impartial in character..." and so on. They return to this theme again in the section of the Report, on Teaching, (paragraph 10): "Controversial subjects are frequently raised and sometimes pursued with considerable vigour and plainness of expression", but "... there is a prevailing sense of fair play for views of all kinds which says much about the spirit in which the classes are conducted". The "... fundamental qualities of candour and detachment in the pursuit of knowledge" are noted and praised. "Teaching of this quality may be said to convey something more important than a piece of history or a set of economic doctrines".<sup>40</sup>

The 'classic' status which Raybould gave to the Report is fundamentally related to the socio-historically specific values attached to a cluster of related words:

scientific, rational, detached, impartial, objective, neutral, . . .  
fair, balanced, tolerant, moderate, factual, (as opposed to):  
dogma, bias, doctrine, theory, opinion.

I select for the focus of discussion here the key-word, objectivity.

A notion of this concept is fundamental to both the conventional



Responsible Body view of 'university standards' and the idea of a liberal education:

It is a necessary feature of knowledge as such that there be public criteria whereby the true is distinguishable from the false, the good from the bad, the right from the wrong. It is the existence of these criteria that gives objectivity to knowledge; and this in its turn gives objectivity to the concept of liberal education. (Paul Hirst)<sup>41</sup>

'Objectivity' is a profoundly difficult word which - like related key-words, subjectivity, pragmatism and doctrine - has radically different meanings at different times and in different minds. It is interesting to note, for instance, that pragmatism can carry a strong stress on, "keeping close to the facts", and be justified by distinction from dogmatic and yet have an earlier meaning of opinionated and dogmatic, as in: "irrelevant and pragmatic dogmatism" (1872).<sup>42</sup> Likewise, with doctrinaire and indoctrination. The wholly negative sense that we associate with these words now contrasts sharply with the positive sense the words could carry until recently when, as Williams says, "It is curious to read, in Mark Pattison, from as late as 1868, 'The philosophical sciences can only be indoctrinated by a master'"<sup>43</sup>

Since late Victorian times and through to the mid-20th century, objectivity had a particular but deeply influential conventional meaning in English. This meaning (understood and promoted by Hobhouse and Headlam and their successors through to Raybould) was part of a general anti-dogmatic positivism (defined, in 1892, as, "the representation of facts without any admixture of theory and mythology").<sup>44</sup>

For decades, however, there had been a probing of this conventional meaning of objectivity (and the related words) in the W.E.A.. The Principal of Ruskin College wrote a searching article on The Meaning of Bias in Adult Education<sup>45</sup> in the 1930s in which he exposed the danger of an objectivity and impartiality which could lead tutors to

a frustrating 'sit-on-the-fence' academicism. He stated simply that, "to have an open mind is not to have an empty mind"<sup>46</sup> and he quoted Lloyd George who once said of a fellow statesman that, "he had sat for so long on the fence, the iron had entered his soul". Advocating a frank admission of the tutor's own "preferences" in the "indefatigable pursuit of Truth" he expressed sympathy "with the Irishman who said he was going to steer a middle course between partiality and impartiality".<sup>47</sup>

### Objectivity - A W.E.A. Argument

A major debate on 'objectivity' took place in the W.E.A. journal, The Highway in the early 1950s. Thomas Hodgkin, the Secretary of the Oxford Extra-Mural Delegacy, initiated this with his article, Objectivity, Ideologies and the Present Political Situation.<sup>48</sup> (The crisis in North Staffordshire - as described earlier in the chapter on Residential Education - prompted, no doubt, his concern about this issue).

The aim of his article was to present the case against those who had the "tendency to argue that Marxists are incapable of objectivity... a doctrine I believe to be mistaken and dangerous". He states his belief that, "Fabians and Christians - like some Marxists - can fall short of the standard of objectivity",<sup>49</sup> and he denies that the Marxist is a special case:

The Marxist (or Christian) tutor who understands and values his craft, would no more use his class-room for purposes of conversion than the Marxist (or Christian) doctor would use his surgery.<sup>50</sup>

The article provoked a sharp response, in opposition. Professor Raybould replied that the "question was not whether all Marxists are capable of objectivity in their teaching, but those Marxists who are also Communists"<sup>51</sup> as the Communist Party "organisation requires members to use whatever opportunities present themselves to propagate



their faith". Dr. C.A. Smith argued similarly saying that Stalin enjoined Marxists to treat education as a 'weapon' and he asked:

Why does Mr. Hodgkin write what every Marxist knows to be untrue?...

He does so because Communists in democratic countries always claim for themselves the right always refused to non-Communists in Communist countries.<sup>52</sup>

And Roy Shaw said that Lenin had proclaimed a specifically "Communist morality" which is "wholly subordinated to the class struggle of the proletariat".<sup>53</sup>

In the next issue of The Highway, Henry Collins came to Hodgkin's defence saying that the logic of these arguments would demand a " 'Committee of Un-British Activities' to ferret out C.P. members" and he said that Dr. Smith had used the word 'objectivity' in relation to Soviet Marxists' views whilst failing to appreciate or acknowledge a distinction, in Russian, between two words: objectivnost (an objectivity valued by Marxists) and objectivism (an inability to draw conclusions from the facts). Collins went on to refer to Lenin's acceptance of an objective reality and truth.<sup>54</sup>

Another W.E.A. tutor, Elaine Morgan, wrote a spirited and entertaining 'plague-on-both-your-houses' letter. She noted that it seemed to be accepted on all sides that the criterion of a good educator is objectivity and one correspondent, she thought, even seemed to regard it as one of the 'liberal Christian' virtues; "liberal maybe, Christian be blowed..." she retorted. Objectivity may be all every well in science, but literature and history are being drained of their vigour:

What is it then we are offered in the guise of objectivity?

It consists, in the first place, of a charming diffidence of approach, a thick rain of 'almosts' and 'generally speakings' and 'in my opinions' and 'tendency tos' and believed to be's... In the



second place, it consists of a careful pruning of those little gremlins, the emotionally charged words.<sup>55</sup>

That conflict around the word 'objectivity' was being fought out in the early 1950s, but since then the confidence in the conventional, positivistic 'objectivity' has been questioned and severely shaken by some formidable scholarly critiques from within Academe itself. E.H. Carr, in the early 1960s most effectively demonstrated the naivety of the fact-theory polarisation which was an essential part of the conventional view:

In spite of C.P. Scott's motto, 'facts are sacred, comment is free', every journalist knows today that the most effective way to influence opinion is by the selection and arrangement of facts. It used to be said that the facts speak for themselves. This is, of course, untrue. The facts speak only when the historian calls on them: it is he who decides to which facts to give the floor and in what order or context. It was, I think, one of Pirandello's characters who said that a fact is like a sack - it won't stand up till you've put some-thing in it... The serious historian is the one who recognises the historically conditioned character of all values, not the one who claims for his own values an objectivity beyond history.<sup>56</sup>

Distinguished academics working in other disciplines - economics, sociology, philosophy, literary criticism<sup>57</sup> - wrote in a similar vein against what they saw as a naive positivism and objectivity, demonstrating a paradox: that the claim made for a 'value-free', 'objective' and 'impartial' teaching can itself be ideological, based upon a theory which over-simplifies the problematic nature of the word, 'objectivity'.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### II. Marxism and Objectivity

The contrast between the W.E.A.'s approach (as outlined by Headlam and Hobhouse) and the frankly partisan approach of the Labour College movement appears to be stark and irreconcilable when we read the stated aims of the N.C.L.C., but the differences are not so great at this theoretical level either when we look closely at what leading Marxists have said about the nature of objective knowledge. There are, in any case, some significant similarities between the early N.C.L.C. and W.E.A. official statements on educational aims and methodology. Both emphasised the 'scientific' approach based on an empiricism and positivism, placing great importance on the 'actual facts' which it was the educator's duty to unfold before the student.

Then, most crucially, despite the partisan thrust of Labour College propaganda and the implicit rejection of academic 'objectivity' ("I can promise to be candid, but not impartial", was a favourite Plebs quotation), there is - in mainstream Marxism - a shared, confident acceptance of the reality of 'objective truth'.

Marxism is, of course, a materialist political philosophy, but Marx strongly criticised the 18th century French materialists for leaving the human element out of account in their doctrine of the influence of material conditions. In the Third Thesis of Feuerbach he wrote:

The materialist doctrine concerning the changing nature of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and the educator must himself be educated.<sup>58</sup>

Given that the critiques of 'objective bodies of knowledge' in academic circles have come mainly from the left and from Marxist writers, it is useful to remember what Marxist 'classics' have said about objectivity



and relativism.

The Communist Manifesto itself is grounded in materialism which obviously implies an 'objective reality' in the natural world and in history:

Does it require deep intuition to comprehend that man's ideas, views and conceptions, in one word, man's consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and in his social life?<sup>59</sup>

Lenin tried to follow this through and wrote more explicitly about 'objective truth':

To be a materialist is to acknowledge objective truth, which is revealed to us by our sense organs. To acknowledge objective truth, i.e. truth not dependent upon man and mankind, is in one way or another, to recognise absolute truth.<sup>60</sup>

But recognising - climbing Donne's huge Hill towards - absolute truth is difficult because:

In a word, every ideology is historically conditional, but it is unconditionally true that to every scientific ideology (as distinct, for instance, from religious ideology), there corresponds an objective truth, absolute nature.<sup>61</sup>

These 'historically conditional' limits create obstacles and difficulties preventing full recognition of absolute truth and therefore a kind of relativism must be acknowledged:

The materialist dialectics of Marx and Engels certainly does contain relativism, but it is not reducible to relativism, that is, it recognises the relativity of all our knowledge, not in the sense of denying objective truth, but in the sense that the limits of approximation of our knowledge to this truth are historically conditional.<sup>62'</sup>

When Trotsky endeavoured, defensively, to justify his approach and method of writing his biography of Stalin he did so in terms that would



surely satisfy any bourgeois academic historian with the Headlam-Hobhouse concern for facts, objectivity and verifiable evidence:

This work is built of facts and is solidly grounded in documents.

It stands to reason that here and there partial and minor errors or trivial offences in emphasis and misinterpretation may be found.

But what no one will find in this work is an unconscientious attitude towards facts, the deliberate disregard of documentary evidence or arbitrary conclusions based only on general prejudice. The author did not overlook a single fact, document or bit of testimony resounding to the benefit of the hero of this book.

If a penetrating, thoroughgoing and conscientious gathering of facts, even of minor episodes, the verification of the testimony of witnesses with the aid of methods of historical and biographical criticism, and finally the inclusion of facts of personal life in their relation to our hero's role in the historical process - if all of this is not objectivity, then I ask, what is objectivity?<sup>63\*</sup>

It is true, of course, that many Marxist and non-Marxist scholars are now united, as we have seen, in stressing, beyond this, the awareness that:

... the researcher approaches the facts with categories and implicit and unconscious preconceptions which close off to him, in advance, any way to an objective understanding. (Goldmann)<sup>64</sup>

Nevertheless, right through to the present day one form of Marxism at least has held on to a 'scientific' view of 'objective truth'.

Lucio Colletti in his widely praised book, From Rousseau to Lenin, published in 1972, states that as a scientific doctrine Marxism is concerned essentially with the "discovery of objective causal relationships" and he approvingly quotes Hilferding's Preface to Finance Capital where he argues - "as did more or less all orthodox Marxists of the

Second International" - that Marxism is a scientifically logical doctrine, "not bound by value judgements". Colletti adds that one can, "accept the science without desiring the end".<sup>65</sup>

Given that any serious researcher and educator is concerned to get at the truth, should there not be some fundamental similarity in the educational method by which teacher and students (Marxist, non-Marxist or whatever) set out to extend their knowledge, edging humanity a little further up that craggy hill?

From the beginning, opponents have levelled against Marx and Marxism the charges of determinism, doctrinal rigidity and totalitarianism - in educational terms, propaganda rather than an open and disinterested scholarship. The controversy at the beginning of the 1950s in The Highway was, as we have just seen, about this issue, and we shall consider a similar controversy about Open University courses in the 1970s. It is a huge and complex issue which must, nevertheless, be faced. This can be done most effectively and economically, for our purposes, by taking the issue up from 1956 and by examining the views of one influential Marxist writer and adult education tutor.

#### E.P. Thompson: Marxism and Libertarianism

E.P. Thompson was born in 1924.<sup>66</sup> He is, therefore, a contemporary of Raymond Williams and he has the same stature as an intellectual and socialist writer. He is more of a public figure than Williams because he became one of the best-known spokesmen in Europe on behalf of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. His father was a Methodist minister, missionary to India, a novelist, and associate of Gandhi and close personal friend of Nehru. His brother, Frank, was parachuted into Bulgaria during the war, fought alongside the partisans, was tortured and executed by the Nazis, and given the title of National Hero by the Bulgarians, with a railway station named after him. For Edward both



father and brother remain heroes - embodying the best of English Methodism and Romantic Socialism. Edward was himself an officer at the age of twenty in the 6th Armoured Division in Italy and France. As a young student at Cambridge he read English Literature for the first part of his degree, under Leavis, before turning to History for the second part. After the War he taught for a number of years in what he called, and still calls, 'the Adult Education movement'.

In 1956, when tanks from the Soviet Union put down the Hungarian rising in Budapest this produced the schism which caused 10,000 members to leave the British Communist Party, including E.P. Thompson. He formed, with others, the New Left and helped to establish the journal The New Left Review.

1956 was also the year of Krushchev's 'secret speech' to the C.P. S.U.. The controversy around all that happened internationally in 1956 extended and illuminated the argument about dogmatism and Marxism.

In the big debate that ensued within the British Communist Party on the 'cult of the individual' Eleanor and Michael Barratt Brown, for instance, wrote:

... amid the spate of self-criticism that seems to be largely critical of somebody else we have yet to see public recognition of a number of grave errors, of which we, who write this letter, consider ourselves to have been culpable... we certainly shared in the immoderate adulation of Stalin...".<sup>67</sup>

Stalin and Stalinism were associated by some Marxists contributing to this debate with a long-standing dogmatism within Marxism. John Saville wrote:

A social theory that fails to provide essential clues to a contemporary society will soon become a museum piece, and this is the position in which much Marxism now finds itself... This apparently built-in tendency towards dogmatism among Marxists has certainly been



present since the days of the 1880s.<sup>68</sup>

E.P. Thompson said the same, but was more specific:

... the dogmatism which in the Soviet Union has taken institutional form is kin to that which Engels took issue with in the British and American Labour movement in the 1880s. "People who pass as orthodox Marxists have turned our ideas of movement into a fixed dogma to be learned by heart... and appear as pure sects."<sup>69</sup>

Thompson was working in adult education in the 1950s throughout the period he worked on and wrote his first two major books: of the first, William Morris - Romantic to Revolutionary, (published in 1955) he writes (in 1976):

I wrote it in an embattled mood, from a position of a strong political commitment, addressing an audience in the adult education movement and in the political movement of the Left rather than a more academic public.<sup>70</sup>

In the Preface to The Making of the English Working Class ('probably the most influential single work of historical scholarship by a socialist today')<sup>71</sup> he acknowledges:

I have also learned a great deal from members of my tutorial classes with whom I have discussed many of the themes treated here.<sup>72</sup>

He has also written and lectured about adult education. In his 1950 article, Against University Standards, he criticised the wide acceptance of objectivity as an aim and an end in itself in adult education.<sup>73</sup>

Objectivity, he said, is a means not an end, just as disciplined study is itself no more than a means adopted in the pursuit of truth. He gave the Fifth Mansbridge Memorial Lecture in Leeds on Education and Experience in which he warned of the dangers of working class students offering themselves as, "fertile pastures upon which the demagogues and the careerists may safely graze", and he argued that university extra-mural departments should be an outlet for knowledge and skills and an

inlet for experience and criticism (an appropriate Mansbridgean theme).<sup>74</sup>

'Education and experience' is a theme he returns to in wider political contexts. He said in an interview in 1978:

... it is, perhaps, the good fortune of my generation that we experienced a very different initiation into political work - one which men and women with a record of practical activity in their communities or in industry were teaching us all the time.

And he contrasted this with the contemporary situation, complaining, "I am fed up with the situation in which intellectuals and theorists continue to talk only to each other."<sup>75</sup>

Part of that experience of contact with working people in their communities included his weekly adult class meetings in Halifax, Calderdale and elsewhere in the West Riding, which kept him in touch with the day-to-day reality of working class experience and views.

Thompson is, of course, most widely known today for his writing, speaking and campaigning for C.N.D. and the European Nuclear Disarmament campaign. He is a libertarian with a strong concern for civil rights and liberties. As an historian he is, like Tawney, a master of prose (Perry Anderson claims his histories are "major works of literature").<sup>76</sup> But it is his position and thinking as a Marxist we are seeking to examine and probe. Where does Thompson stand on some of the key questions we have been concerned with?

In his long polemical essay The Poverty of Theory, writing as a "practitioner of historical materialism", he states that Marx and Engels repeatedly and in the most specific terms, "infer the reality of both process and structure 'inscribed in' history, affirm the objectivity of historical knowledge".<sup>77</sup> He then spends several pages on a contemporary Marxist text of the Althusserian school, "facts are never given, they are always produced",<sup>78</sup> in which he develops his own affirmation of the irreducible, independent reality of historical



evidence. He states that disagreement between historians may be of many kinds, but they will remain as mere exchanges of attitude or exercises of ideology, "unless it is agreed that they are conducted within a common discipline whose pursuit is objective knowledge". But he qualifies this immediately with the rider that the 'significance' of that past, its meaning to us, involves evaluative and subjective judgement. He continues:

We may agree not only that such judgements as to the 'meaning' of history are a proper and important activity, a way in which today's actors identify their values and their goals, but that it is also an inevitable activity. That is, the pre-occupations of each generation, sex or class must inevitably have a normative content, which will find expression in the questions proposed to the evidence. But this in no way calls in question the objective determinacy of the evidence. It is simply a statement as to the complexity, not just of history, but of ourselves (who are simultaneously valuing and rational beings) - a complexity which enters into all forms of social self-knowledge, and which requires in all disciplines procedural safeguards. It is, exactly, within historical logic that such attributions of meaning, if covert and improper, are exposed; it is in this way that historians find each other out. A feminist historian will say, or ought to say, that this history-book is wrong, not because it is written by a man, but because the historian neglected contiguous evidence or proposed conceptually-inadequate questions: hence a masculine 'meaning' or bias was imposed upon the answers. It is the same with the somewhat intemperate arguments which I and my Marxist colleagues often provoke within the academic profession. The appeal is not (or is rarely) to a choice of values, but to the logic of the discipline. And if we deny the determinate properties of the object, then no discipline remains.<sup>79</sup>



A corollary of this assertion of the complexity of a history made and interpreted by simultaneously rational and valuing beings is a rejection of the conclusion that there is a 'class morality' or, as Roy Shaw put it claiming the authority of Lenin, a 'communist morality' which then renders any educational process in history of whatever discipline, subordinate to the over-riding aims of this morality expressed through the class struggle.

Thompson had taken issue with G.D.H. Cole on this very point in the New Reasoner in 1957. Cole had drawn the conclusion, in the turmoil of conflict in the communist movement in 1956, that after committing, and condoning, such 'mistakes' as had been exposed, Marxism was condemned to the derision and the disgust of history. Cole had concluded that the entire structure of communist ideology rested on the belief that, "there is in the real world no morality except class morality", and those who feel revulsion at what has happened in the name of communism "are not 'real' Communists, but are left wing democratic socialists who do not at bottom accept Marx's ideas". Thompson wrote:

In phrasing his argument this way, I think Professor Cole misstates the nature of the conflict now taking place within the world communist movement. The premise which he advances ('class morality') can certainly be derived from certain writings of Marx and Engels, and more especially of Lenin, but it is certainly not the whole of their meaning, implicit and explicit. And the conclusions derived from it are - it seems to me - an accurate summary not of 'real' Communism but of the partisan ideology of Stalinism, which emerged in particular conditions and which has never been co-terminous with the whole communist movement. Hence, it may equally be said that this conflict is the revolt against the ideology of Stalinism, and a struggle to make explicit the true, humanist content of 'real' Communism".<sup>80</sup>

More than twenty years later, this conflict about the 'real' Communism and Marxism was provoking Thompson to write with still greater polemical passion and to a wider public. He replied to a Conor Cruise O'Brien article in The Observer attacking Marxism by conceding, however, that:

Anyone who is even casually informed knows that Marxism, as an intellectual system, is in a state of crisis. The term 'Marxism' conceals an immense conflict going on between different claimants to the Marxist tradition. In Russia dissidents like Roy Medvedev are offering, in Marxist terms, scholarly exposures of the Stalin era - analyses which are refused publication by Soviet (Marxist-Leninist) publishing houses. In East Germany Rudolf Bahro, a Marxist, is imprisoned by a Marxist state for his stubborn and honest thought.<sup>81</sup>

Given that 'The Great Fear of Marxism' in the West is fed by the political realities of 'actually existing socialism' the importance, for Thompson and other claimants to the Marxist tradition in the West, of Roy Medvedev and the Marxist dissidents in the East is that they help keep the 'real' Marxism alive there.

Let us consider a crucial aspect of Roy Medvedev's Marxist response, writing from within the Soviet Union, to that system and to that society:

As a Marxist... my hopes are bound up with the development of political freedom, freedom of speech and of information, that is with the development of socialist democracy. However, for me the concept of democracy also includes genuine freedom of conscience. So long as there are believers in our country, they must be allowed to perform all the rites prescribed by their religion. Oppression of the Church is also one of the ways in which democracy is violated. Socialism is a social system in which the free development of every individual is the condition for the development of society as a whole...

Socialist society sets itself the task of securing the greatest



possible satisfaction not only of the material but also the spiritual demands of human beings... For me, as for every thinking Marxist, socialist democracy means not only guaranteeing the rights of the majority but also the rights of the minority, including the minority's right to formulate and assert their own views and beliefs. Socialist democracy means guaranteeing freedom of conscience, speech and publication, freedom to receive and disseminate information, freedom of scientific and artistic creation. In socialist society there must be no persecution of heterodoxy and opposition views, for without the right to opposition no democracy can exist.<sup>82</sup>

Medvedev's work as a historian and socialist writer commands respect amongst a wide range of Marxists: when the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation commissioned essays on an article Medvedev had had published in New Left Review in 1973, eleven essays were published in the book, Detente and Socialist Democracy - a discussion with Roy Medvedev,<sup>83</sup> written by mainly Marxist authors (including E.P. Thompson) from nine different countries. What he writes above on the importance of political and religious freedoms, minority rights, pluralism and so on indicates a democratic commitment which Tawney, Mansbridge and indeed any democrat of any political persuasion could applaud.

Thompson has annoyed and provoked some of the new generation of Marxists in Britain by directing his formidable literary invective against what he feels is their intense and imported 'ivory tower' theoreticism which underplays the value of these libertarian issues and traditions in his own country. When The Leveller interviewer asked, following a fairly characteristic Thompson attack on the elitism and arrogance ("they have no humility in relation to people engaged in practical activity") of some Marxist intellectuals, "Do you therefore discount any contribution made by the thinkers of the 'new Marxism'?" he replied:



No. Of course not. I think some part of the re-claimed birth of Marxist theory in the West has been a genuine advance which won't be lost. But it has often rather smudged over important areas of the libertarian tradition and libertarian thought. It has tended to under-estimate the values of democratic practice by confusing them utterly with something called bourgeois liberalism or bourgeois democracy. The two things are completely different. We have a long and dogged record of democratic practice in this country, as is true elsewhere.<sup>84</sup>

It was that deeply implanted, dogged, democratic practice in the adult education movement which particularly attracted the commitment of Thompson's teachers, G.D.H. Cole ('in Labour History he showed us all the way') and his peer, Raymond Williams.

#### Gramsci, Hegemony and Education

Gramsci has had an important influence on Marxist and left wing thinking in Britain since the 1960s and E.P. Thompson, like many others, has engaged with Gramsci's notion of hegemony.<sup>85</sup>

The term was derived from the Russian socialist movement, where Plekhanov and Axelrod had been the first to employ it, in strategic discussions of the future leadership by the working class of a revolution in Russia. Gramsci adopted the term and transformed it into something like a new concept altogether (theorizing about the political structures of capitalist power that did not exist in Tsarist Russia). He formulated the concept of hegemony to designate the decisively greater strength and complexity of bourgeois class rule in Western Europe, which had prevented any repetition of the October Revolution. This hegemonic system of power was defined by the degree of consent it obtained from the people it dominated, and a consequent reduction in the scale of coercion needed to repress them. This consent was secured through a

ramified network of cultural institutions - schools, churches, newspapers, parties, associations - inculcating a passive subordination in the exploited classes. The flexible and dynamic hegemony exercised by capital over labour in the West through this stratified consensual structure, represented a far harder barrier for the socialist movement to overcome than it had encountered in Russia. Economic crises, of the type which earlier Marxists had seen as the central lever of revolution under capitalism could be constrained and withstood by this political order. A long and difficult 'war of position' would be necessary to contend with it. With this set of conceptions, Gramsci sought to find a theoretical explanation of the basic historical impasse that faced Western Marxists and socialists.

Understandably, given this perspective (and his personal history - coming from a poor background) Gramsci gave particular attention in his writings to the role of education and the way hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces worked or could work within Western European societies.

Harold Entwistle's book, Antonio Gramsci: Conservative Schooling for Radical Politics is a fascinating study of the paradox in Gramsci's writing about education, which, when read in isolation from the rest of his work, "reads like a 'Black Paper' forty years before its time".<sup>86</sup>

A paradox which is only underlined by the fact that Gramsci's fascist adversaries seemed to be speaking the language of progressive education.

The probing of this paradox brings to the fore contradictions and tensions which are acutely relevant to this inquiry, and it is Entwistle's thesis that close examination of Gramsci's work reveals that although he was quite centrally concerned with exactly those themes which have exercised modern radical educationalists (the sociology of the curriculum; the apparent discontinuity between the culture of the school and that of daily life; the role of the state in the provision of education; the cultivation of elites and the role of intellectuals; and the consideration of these themes in relation to the education of the working class)



his conclusions in these matters point in different directions from those in some contemporary Marxist educational theory.

To achieve a successful replacement of capitalist hegemony by building a working class counter hegemony with the workers learning to think and act like a 'ruling class' was Gramsci's claim and this provoked controversy in the Italian Socialist and Communist Parties about the place of education in the making of socialism. That Gramsci saw education as integral to this task is indicated by the rubric which the first issue of L'Ordine Nuovo carried on its masthead:

Instruct yourselves because we shall need all our intelligence.

Agitate because we shall need all our enthusiasm. Organise yourselves because we shall need all our power.<sup>87</sup>

He believed that, "every relationship of 'hegemony' is necessarily a pedagogical relationship".<sup>88</sup> Gwyn Williams' summary of Gramsci's distinctive contribution to political theory makes it clear that Gramsci saw the counter-hegemonic task as one of education:

Gramsci's most creative and distinctive development of Marxism, was his exploration of the essential problem of breaking the bourgeois hegemony over workers' minds, the need for workers and the workers' party to think themselves into historical autonomy, without which no permanent revolution is possible.<sup>89</sup>

From this it may seem to follow that Gramsci would therefore demand a rejection of bourgeois culture and the traditional institutions and their methods, favouring instead the creation of independent, radically new approaches to education.

In fact, "It is clear that Gramsci believed in an active teacher transmitting the mainstream humanistic culture enforcing linguistic discipline and accuracy".<sup>90</sup> Another writer has remarked upon "that substantial part of Gramsci's work that consists of the defence and



illustration of formal logic, classic culture, liberal education and disinterested inquiry". (McCinnes)<sup>91</sup>

Gramsci evidently subscribed to a view of human knowledge which valued academic objectivity and he believed that:

... the humanistic culture of the school should enshrine the traditional academic values of objectivity, pluralism... rationality - the disinterested pursuit of knowledge.<sup>92</sup>

Marx had taken the view that schools for children had to be neutral: the 'truths' which are partisan and dependent upon 'party prejudices' should not be taught in schools. It should be left to adults to form their own opinions on these matters, "about which instruction should be given in the lecture hall, not in the school"; (statement to the General Council of the International, 1869).<sup>93</sup>

Gramsci developed the distinction (derived from Hegel) between political society and civil society. He uses the term political society for the coercive relations which are materialised in the various institutions of the state (notably the armed forces, the legal system and the police, all the administrative departments concerning taxation, finance, social security etc.). Civil society is the sphere where political parties, trade unions, religious bodies and a great variety of other organisations operate. Civil society and the state are not, obviously, physically divided into separate areas with a clearly defined boundary between them. It is possible for an organisation to embody relations belonging to both civil society and the state. This applies especially to schools, universities and other educational institutions. There are significant elements of coercion involved in education, arising from the need to make attendance at schools compulsory, and the need to rely on taxation to provide the necessary funds.<sup>94</sup>

Entwistle concludes that the proper inference to be drawn from Gramsci is that it is unrealistic to look to schools for a radical,

counter-hegemonic education: the burden of this enterprise lies with institutions for adult education, and especially in those political institutions dedicated to social change and in economic associations where workers are involved in productive relationships which have their own educational imperatives.

For Gramsci, adult political education posed what he called, "the 'juridicial problem': that is, the problem of assimilating the entire grouping to its most advanced fraction; it is a problem of education of the masses".<sup>95</sup> But the development of working class consciousness required the education of intellectuals organic to the working class itself. These would provide leadership in the counter-hegemonic movement but in a reciprocal relationship with traditional intellectuals. This notion of the organic relationship of an intellectual to his/her class carries the egalitarian acceptance of the possibility - the necessity, indeed - of communication. He was strongly critical of the tendency of some intellectuals to treat working class people and students condescendingly:

If there is in the world anything which is valuable in itself, all are capable and deserving of enjoying it. There are neither two truths nor two different modes of discussion... You want him who was a slave yesterday to be a man? Then begin to treat him always as a man and the greatest step forward will already have been made.<sup>96</sup> In Italy, some adult educational initiatives had failed in this respect, being somewhat like pedagogical 'soup kitchens' or like missionaries in Africa handing out 'trashy baubles' to the natives.<sup>97</sup>

In many ways then, allowing for the differences of background and political traditions, there are affinities with Tawney's educational commitment (although Gramsci's developed concept of hegemony renders Tawney's picture of the working class crowd at last finding the democratic door wide open, fundamentally naive).



Entwistle brings Gramsci and Tawney together in an interesting way in his conclusion:

In an early article in Avanti, he (Gramsci) urged the Socialist Party to work for the creation of 'cultural associations'. He turned for models to other European nations (especially Germany and England) which he felt were well served by "some very powerful organisations of working class and socialist culture". He instanced the Fabian Society, at the time of its affiliation to the International, which had "succeeded in putting into the service of this work of cultivation and spiritual liberation, a great part of the English intellectual and university world". The work of Tawney, on behalf of the Workers' Educational Association, in journeying each weekend to teach economic history to potters in Stoke and weavers in Rochdale is perhaps the best known example of this aspect of the history of adult education.<sup>98</sup>

Entwistle is at pains to underline that when what he calls the "neo-Marxist sociologists of education" criticise the "social-democratic ideology that goes back to Tawney" they are criticising precisely Gramsci's position.<sup>99</sup>

He also claims that the relevance of Gramsci today lies not merely in his substantive contribution towards clarification of all these problems but equally in his examination of the complex relationships between politics and education.

A view of the still changing nature of that complexity is offered by the controversy in British higher education which focussed, in part around these allegedly "neo-Marxist sociologists of education" in the mid-1970s.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### III. Controversy about Bias in the Open University and in Broadcasting

#### Scholarship or Propaganda - a 1970s argument

In 1977 a major conflict and debate burst upon the educational world about alleged radical and Marxist 'penetration' in higher education in Britain.

In February 1977, Professor Julius Gould wrote an article in the Times Educational Supplement in which he criticised an Open University publication, the Reader Schooling and Capitalism from the Open University course, Schooling and Society.<sup>100</sup>

This initiated a controversy which continued over a seven months period in the national and educational press (primarily in The Times group of newspapers). The controversy widened considerably to embrace not just the O.U. course but the Open University itself, and, indeed, with the publication of the 'Gould Report' in September 1977, higher education in general became the arena for heated debate.<sup>101</sup>

It extends and refines our analysis to see in what ways this controversy bore similarities to earlier ones we have dealt with and to note where there were differences.

Professor Gould and his supporters presented the issue as a straight and seemingly irreconcilable opposition between the 'scholarly mode' and the 'radical mode' in education. Teachers and writers within the 'scholarly mode' have a general commitment to objectivity and to dispassionate evaluation whereas 'radical mode' practitioners are propagandists who reject key notions long associated with the idea of an open, plural society.

In this way the controversy was a replay of the charges and the responses worked through decades earlier in the columns of Plebs, The Highway and Adult Education. This time, though, the issue was not at all about independent working class education, but rather sharply focussed upon academic freedom, independence and responsibility within state-funded higher education.

Marxism and Marxist teachers were characterised in terms identical to those Thomas Hodgkin had taken issue with in the early 1950s: rigid, dogmatic, 'distanced from the canons of rationality and objectivity' and associated with oppression and denial of freedom to alternative views.<sup>102\*</sup>

The Times, devoting its lead editorial to the 'Gould Report' on September 21st 1977, wrote:

Marxism and oppression are too closely associated in the world for it to be possible to view these developments without misgivings. Indeed, Marx himself was a totalitarian thinker.

And Richard Hoggart in an important contribution to the New Statesman referred directly to 'actually existing socialism' - "having seen over five years the rigid management of consensus in Eastern Europe" - to make a contrast with "our system" which is, "in some ways admirable". There is, he wrote, "still useful meaning to the phrase, an open society and in such a society, despite all faults, something escapes from other pressures of the system; something gets done honestly".<sup>103</sup>

The 'Gould Report' was now warning, however, against the threat presented to the 'academic-mode' from other forms of radicalism:

In addition to the educational efforts of Marxist organisations and individuals there are other forms of radicalism which have had wide and influential circulation. These forms stress the difficulty of 'objectivity' in cultural and educational knowledge... The direct and



indirect onslaught on objectivity has (had) influence in unsettling and discrediting established modes of educational thinking and practice and making those thus unsettled more receptive to Communist Party and Trotskyist influence.<sup>104</sup>

Professor Gould made it clear that he was not wishing to deny a place for a 'Marxist viewpoint' in educational courses but he was strongly critical of the Open University Schooling and Capitalism block because,

The O.U. block... is a horse of a different colour... it pre-empt, via its concepts and materials the attention of its students in the service of one perspective, without an adequate discussion of alternatives.

And he argued that O.U. publications carry something of a "seal of academic approval".<sup>105</sup>

To the extent that Gould was concerned about the educational problems endemic in distance-learning on the scale of the Open University his position was not dissimilar, in fact, to that held by some radicals and socialists who were sceptical about the O.U.'s concentration and centralisation of the teaching process.

Raymond Williams, in a long article in The Listener in 1971, had made these points about the 'actual process' of teaching and learning with the Open University. About the early units and course books he wrote:

... unusually attractive booklets. I still wonder how they can possibly be afforded, and whether the investment isn't so high that the people at the centre who wrote them won't have an administrative reason to add to their arguments that they shouldn't be changed or scrapped.

And on the television and radio broadcasts:

There's no simple judgement, as we look over the whole range... some silly and not a few dull programmes... several good... some



memorable. That would not be a bad average for a sampling of lectures in, say, Cambridge, but of course there's the extra risk of exposure to too few minds: identifiable biases or hobby-horses which can't be corrected by walking across to the next lecture room.<sup>106</sup>

Robert Nicodemus, after reviewing the 'feedback' from students and part-time tutors on the controversial Schooling and Society course and finding little evidence of concern about Marxist bias, went on, nevertheless, to write:

The threat to academic freedom and its close colleague, creativity, may be more real than ever with its reincarnation in a technological system or machine. The O.U. may best maintain and develop its humanistic side in resisting distancing of the centre from the periphery in any form - especially production from tuition, scholarship from political commitment, or insertion of technological substitutes of specious certainty for creativity.<sup>107</sup>

Williams, writing at the end of the 1970s, took the argument back to make the connections with the older notions of adult education democracy:

I supported the idea of the Open University very strongly, but I also thought it could be combined with a reshaping of adult education, which, as I said before, had run into new kinds of difficulty.

There could be a connection between education by television, radio and correspondence courses, and the kind of tutorial class education which had been so well developed by the W.E.A.. It would not have been easy, and I am sure there were political reasons for wanting to push a prepared idea of the Open University through, against its many enemies on the right. But Jennie Lee later told me, at a Guardian dinner, ... that ... she had decided to steer clear of the old types of adult education and set up what looked as much as possible like a conventional university, including the 'trimmings'.

So that was it, that kind of assimilated even where radical initiative,

and the Open University still has no properly based tutorial organisation, and little of our old educational democracy.<sup>108</sup>

The O.U. was, furthermore, open to a new kind of attack on bias in education (and pressure to be assimilated) because this kind of distance teaching is particularly vulnerable to external inspection and criticism in a way that orthodox university teaching and traditional adult education have not been. Students replied making this point and several, in correspondence, followed through to say that adult students are, in any case, more capable of seeing bias than younger students. One who wrote to the T.H.E.S. said that the O.U. students and staff are constantly requested to criticise and, "we have long known who is red and who is dead, making due allowance for each."<sup>109</sup>

Two lecturers from other universities made points germane to our theme when they entered the controversy in the educational press: a letter from a lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies, Aberdeen University, noted the decision of the O.U. Senate to instigate an inquiry into alleged bias in some of its courses and asked would those who favour this, "support a similar inquiry into the possible bias towards the Christian religion in... faculties and departments of divinity or theology?".<sup>110</sup> And a Literature lecturer wrote:

Marxism has at least the virtue of being obvious and open for inspection... The danger of an invisible ideology is perhaps less in a discipline like sociology where the subject matter is manifestly political than in subjects like literature and philosophy where the materials and themes seem not to be political. To take an example from within my own experience: in English Literature teaching the majority of syllabuses dish up an authorized canon of texts and recognise no obligation to examine the basis on which the selection has been made.<sup>111</sup>



Finally, just as in earlier decades the national and international climate helped cause a heightening of tensions and pressures for social control in the politically sensitive area of adult education so it was felt at this time that the whole intervention in 1977 had itself, "the distinct flavour of a political campaign".<sup>112</sup> Stuart Hall said of the T.E.S. article, "I am sure that it will have, in the present climate, the effect of screwing the ideological temperature up another notch".<sup>113</sup> And Richard Hoggart described the 'Gould Report' in his New Statesman article as "an alarmist pamphlet" which "will feed ill-informed and ill-considered right-wing attitudes in politics, industry, commerce, and the universities themselves".<sup>114</sup>

#### Changes in the Climate of Opinion

"Knowledge is Power" - It would, perhaps,  
be easier to demonstrate that today information is power".

Bernard Jennings, 1978. <sup>115</sup>

We get a deeper insight into the relationship between the social and political climate and educational debate, and also into the complexities of this whole argument if we look at what has happened in broadcasting, in the period from 'Pilkington' to 'Annan'.

Back in the 1950s the 'Pilkington Report'<sup>116</sup> had very little to say about bias, or impartiality and when it used the word 'balance' this usually referred to the balance in broadcasting between serious and light programmes, but fifteen years later the 'Annan Report' was quite convinced that, "The questions the public were asking (in the 1970s) about broadcasting were vastly different... they were more critical, more hostile, and more political".<sup>117</sup>

In the section of the Report entitled, Changes in the climate of opinion, 'Annan' enlarges on this:

In the 1960s new visions of life reflected divisions within society,



divisions between classes, the generations and the sexes, between North and South, between the provinces and London, between pragmatists and ideologues... Inevitably, some of the new recruits throughout broadcasting reflected these ideas in their programmes... Now people of all political persuasions began to object that many programmes were biased or obnoxious.<sup>118</sup>

To the 'Pilkington Committee', the News on television did not seem to present any real problems: "News value was a matter for judgement based on experience". And, "if a comparison were drawn with the press, the Daily Telegraph's standard of news values were, in the B.B.C.'s view, nearest their own".<sup>119</sup>

But for the 'Annan Committee', the News had become very problematic; "The notion of impartiality is under siege... It is attacked by sociologists who point out that no-one can be perfectly impartial",<sup>120</sup> and so, "dedicated to outworn concepts of balance and impartiality how can the broadcasters reflect the multitudes of opinions in our pluralistic society?".<sup>121</sup> 'Annan' goes on to say that, "few organisations or people alleged party political bias" but the Committee received:

... substantial evidence that there was an inadequacy amounting to a bias in the reporting of industrial and commercial affairs. The broadcasters were not charged with political bias but with giving an inaccurate and partial picture of industrial life by concentrating on the more dramatic incidents of industrial confrontation. The Glasgow Media Group reported that in the unofficial Glasgow dust-cart drivers' dispute in 1975, over thirteen weeks, twenty-one interviews were shown on national T.V. News and none of those on strike were interviewed.<sup>122</sup>

It is instructive to see here how a sharp distinction is made between party political bias or more simply 'political bias', and a bias in the reporting of industrial confrontation. It is surely disingenuous to

to try to make any kind of rigid distinction between the two because bias in the reporting of industrial and commercial affairs often amounts to political bias and even to party-political bias. There is a wide measure of agreement across the political spectrum that attitudes to trade unions and industrial confrontation during 'the winter of discontent' played a major part in the result of the 1979 General Election. If the substantial evidence referred to is accepted, then it is likely that the political, and the party-political attitudes of people viewing and listening to this reportage will be influenced by this bias.

After quoting several critics on the theme that 'Broadcasters set the agenda' (one of whom, Professor Halloran, states that "T.V. News is a cultural artefact rather than a neutral product"), the Committee concludes:

What protects the public against manipulation of news reporting is not centralisation of editorial decisions. It is variety of news outlets and of editorial judgements, both in broadcasting and in the press, which is maintained in the nation.<sup>123</sup>

But, of course, this begs the question as to whether the 'variety' is itself representative and balanced. If, as can be argued, there is a deep bias against the Left in the press, and in the areas of industrial and commercial broadcasting referred to above, then the fact that there is some variety of news outlets and editorial judgements does not, and will not, answer the charge of political bias.

The implications here are profound and wide-ranging. They are relevant to adult education, and the W.E.A. in particular, for the individual teacher in a class may be starting with a group and a situation and background where bias is the norm.

This is not a new problem or dilemma. Let us go back to the W.E.A.'s Year Book of 1918 and read the concluding 'Thoughts on Working Class Education' of J.A Hobson:

A final word. The Press is probably a more potent instrument for

'influencing' the popular mind than the school. Nominally, the workers are alive to the dangers of a capitalist press. But they have at present no escape. Better school education may abate some of its worst hypnotic tyranny. But the capitalist Press will still continue to select, reject and distort news and views to suit the policy of its owners and the properties classes who advertise. How to secure a genuinely 'popular' Press, self-governing at least in the sense that the reader or consumer and not hidden hands behind the producing machines control the contents, is of more urgent importance than ever... A single newspaper may undo the good of a thousand schools..."<sup>124</sup>

Give or take a few words and phrases, and that passage could be put into any one of many contemporary speeches or articles from the left about bias in the British press and broadcasting (in the 1970s and the 1980s).<sup>125</sup>

Critics of this viewpoint will immediately respond: 'All right, but to replace one kind of bias and dogma (which at least has broad consensus support) with another, is no advance'. This was the response of 'Annan' who argued that the left, "seem to suggest that broadcasters, as in totalitarian countries should consistently disseminate some particular message or some political and social philosophy".<sup>126</sup>

Mind you, 'Annan' also stressed that, in this country, "broadcasters are operating within a system of parliamentary democracy and must share its assumptions"<sup>127</sup> and the Committee offered a 'new' interpretation of impartiality:

1. to allow the greatest possible range of views and opinions to be expressed;
2. to take account not just of the whole range of views but also the weight of opinion which holds these views;
3. to recognise that the weight of opinion and the range of views is constantly changing.<sup>128</sup>



Paragraph two heavily qualifies the first paragraph, because, 'taking into account the weight of opinion' can easily lead to a conservative, cautious, reflection in the news media of a traditional and already determined structure of beliefs and attitudes which is then simply re-inforced by the 'balanced' approach which takes account of that weight. Paragraph three is an important and valuable advance but as in paragraph two the real question is who decides, and how is the change to be evaluated?

We should compare this expression of a policy towards impartiality and balance in broadcasting with an almost identical approach, expressed decades earlier, in relation to teaching in the W.E.A. (see Chapter One, IV). This is profoundly difficult in broadcasting where decision-making must - to some degree - be centralised. It is less difficult in an adult education class where, assuming that the tutor is biased, or his/her presentation and approach is 'unbalanced', then the class members can challenge this directly in discussion.

Ironically, although the 'Pilkington Report' did not pay much attention to these issues, the treatment of that Report in the British press produced what Richard Hoggart described later as:

'... an exceptional demonstration of distortion, tendentiousness, personal abuse, half-truth, straight misrepresentation, disingenuousness, pseudo-honesty and irreponsibility.<sup>129</sup>

The Report, he says in his article, tried to define a democratic position:

It tried to challenge in its discussion of actual programmes and of broadcasting structures that social-cultural stratifying of British society which thinks all demands are satisfied if there are symphony concerts for the high-brows and quizz shows for the masses... In all its recommendations, the Report sought to extend intellectual and imaginative freedom to give more room for variety and dissent...

Its view of society was based on the idea of change and possibility...

The greatest disappointment in the reception of the 'Pilkington Report' was not that so many publicists disagreed with it, but that they approached its themes so shoddily prepared... This has depressing implications and they go far wider than broadcasting matters alone.<sup>130</sup> They certainly do, for what Hoggart records in this book, with its revealing title, Speaking to Each Other, is the breaking of a convention wholly characteristic of the W.E.A.'s formal position that the democratic educational process (with its appeal to reason, impartial judgement and tolerance within a widening democratic discussion) can and will be extended throughout our society.

But Hoggart's criticism makes it clear that the structural, institutional and ideological constraints (maintained by the power of the press, for example), create a situation such that whenever there is a danger of us speaking to each other in terms that directly challenge this hegemony then, as with 'Pilkington', the debate gets distorted, unbalanced, coloured or confined.

Raymond Williams, reviewing Hoggart's two books, Speaking to Each Other, in the Guardian (1970), summarised the 'Difficulties of Democratic Debate' as follows:

Between the late fifties and the early sixties, some of the radical questions about communications, about the uses of literacy, and about culture and society, were forced into public debate and, though with difficulty, into orthodox politics. The critical point of all this, for Hoggart, came with his appointment to the Pilkington Committee on Broadcasting, and with the publication of its report in which he had been, so clearly, a major influence. If I had to choose one piece, from this whole collection, to illustrate the importance and the difficulties of the work Hoggart has been doing, it would be his account of the reception of that Report: "Difficulties of Democratic Debate".



The treatment of the Report's arguments by the whole body of established opinion was indeed, one might say, scandalous. Hoggart shows this by patient argument, and with an obvious sense of injury. His central idea of 'speaking to each other' was outraged by misrepresentation, the prejudice, the shoddiness of the 'replies'. And it is characteristic of him that he sticks to his own tone and position in spite of everything. He goes on believing that the debate is possible...

The confidence that this discussion can be shared and can be extended by education, is his continuing perspective. And that this democratic process has its implacable enemies, its quite fundamental and structural constraints, which will have simply to be broken, he knows, I think, in some reserve of his mind. What he is still pondering, I think, is the effect of saying so openly; the effect on the possibility of continuing to speak to each other.<sup>131</sup>

It is fascinating to note that E.P. Thompson made the same kind of generous criticism of Williams himself (his tone, and his belief that democratic debate was possible with 'established opinion' of the ruling class) ten years earlier in two long articles reviewing The Long Revolution<sup>132\*</sup>

The relevance of all this to the adult education movement and to our central theme should be clear: the issue for these three authors, in this context, is one of individual commitment but they would be the first to say how important it is to see and follow through the ramifications for organisations that attempt to institutionalize the commitment. The W.E.A., from the beginning, has had that aim which has assumed and developed social and educational values of the kind they described (and learned from it) - the determination to develop an educated, participating democracy which involves more than the straight provision of education: it involves deep concern with the questions



'education for whom and for what?'.

But, when this democratic process is locked within a wider system which effectively blocks the extension of these values, are not the questions which the N.C.L.C. threw at the W.E.A. raised again: questions about hegemony and counter-hegemonic forces; the assimilation of radical initiatives, and the incorporation of radical groupings and organisations?

## CHAPTER FIVE

### IV. The 1980s and Towards 2003

This thesis has engaged with the interpretation of adult education history which argues that the W.E.A. has operated within bourgeois 'ideological parameters' and that the concern for Mansbridgean liberal values and academic neutrality has effectively helped neuter the working class movement in Britain.

The foregoing documentation, thematic study, and analysis of biography and history - whilst giving full weight and respect to that argument and version of history - demonstrates (implicitly more often than explicitly) that the interpretation is both too sweeping and schematic to summarise accurately a complicated and very mixed pattern of history.

Moreover, it may now be seen - from the vantage point of the 1980s and with the help of Marxist and other radical historians and social theorists - that an influential but too crude and schematic Marxist history of the W.E.A. and Labour College history ignores or underestimates the problem of what has been happening within the Labour movement itself.

The tension between political commitment and academic neutrality in the W.E.A. has been rooted in Labour movement and working class political and social perspectives. We have seen above how, at every level and turn, the Labour and trade union movement assumptions about collective, co-operative, democratic and egalitarian principles have been the bedrock of W.E.A. and Labour College commitments and, therefore, conflicts.

It follows - obviously, I would say - that if and when the Labour

and trade union movement itself experiences a crisis or watershed then the symbiotically linked W.E.A. will also face a similar crisis and turning point.

In this final section, I want to try to look ahead, towards 2003, anticipating the likely tensions which will be active in the W.E.A. and asking what we may learn from our review of the tensions and conflicts in the past.

In attempting this, it is important to refer to authorities to indicate that the 'crisis' or 'turning point' facing the Labour movement is widely perceived and this is not just an individual or idiosyncratic view. Futurology is the most hazardous of all the 'ologies' and if my prophecies are wrong then I want to be (and to be seen to be) in good company around the same crystal-ball!

#### The Forward March of Labour Halted?

Eric Hobsbawm's argument that the 'Forward March of Labour' had come to a halt twenty-five to thirty years ago, provoked widespread debate and argument when first advanced in the pages of Marxism Today in 1978.<sup>133</sup> Briefly, Hobsbawm set out to confront the crisis in the Labour movement which had resulted from the changing structure of British capitalism and the proletariat in it. For about seventy years, the British working class had developed what he termed a 'common style' within a recognisably homogeneous (though stratified) Labour movement: from that whole cluster of working class institutions - the trade unions, the political parties, the co-ops, the clubs and societies, the chapels - to the non-political aspects of working class life like football, Blackpool, fish and chips, Andy Capp's cap, the council house, the Odeon, and the dance hall. Since the early 1950s this has changed and the Labour movement's forward march has been halted in the process: internal changes in the structure, composition and patterns of work within the



working class have increased a dangerous and divisive kind of 'sectionalism' since the Second World War with different groups of workers each pursuing their own economic interests irrespective of the rest. As an index of the Halt of Labour's March, Hobsbawm noted that trade union membership was in 1978 only a little higher (as a percentage) than in 1948 (46%) and that Britain, the home of mass trade unionism had fallen behind a number of other European countries. Critically, the number and percentage of Labour voters reached a peak in 1951, since when there has only been fitful decline. Acknowledging that the trade union movement became more militant in the 1970s, he characterised this as an economist militancy which can, at times, actually set workers against each other, (through sectionalist in-fighting or competition) rather than establishing a wider pattern of solidarity. He appealed for a realistic and concrete analysis of the reasons for the failures as well as the successes of the Labour movement as an essential starting point for any resumption of the movement forward.

In 1987, the editor of Marxism Today has claimed with some confidence that the Hobsbawm thesis advanced in the 1978 article is now uncontroversial and even common-sense.<sup>134</sup> The changes which Hobsbawm outlined in 1978 have accelerated in the 1980s.

Jeremy Seabrook, writing from a different tradition, in the first issue of the W.E.A.'s new journal, Workers Education, in 1987, adopts a critique similar to Hobsbawm's.<sup>135</sup> He states that the crisis of capitalism has become the crisis of socialism and that with an increasingly global division of labour, solidarity - precarious enough between the workers within Britain - is a far more difficult attainment over such a vast area as the global market. Seabrook stresses that because the new service industries are not in the grimy and infernal factories and forges and mills of the early industrial period, they can more readily be presented as more desirable. Many are associated with glamorous

occupations - leisure and travel, retailing in grandiose shopping malls, hotels and catering, personal services in hairdressing and beauty salons, entertainment and the music industry and the media; all of which require as well as their highly paid stars, increasing numbers of low-paid, unorganised, diffuse and powerless workers. For Seabrook the changes facing the contemporary working class are on an epic scale. He underlines that the implications for the W.E.A. are profound.

#### Tawneyism is not enough

The historian Gareth Stedman Jones approached the crisis facing the Labour movement from a different angle again in an essay, 'Tawneyism is not enough' (The New Statesman, 1984), and as the title signifies his argument has a direct bearing upon our thesis.<sup>136</sup>

Thus, for this historian, the 1980s experience is one of uncertainty and bewilderment: Marxists have had to come to terms with the visible fragmentation of the working class industrial and political solidarities. Fabians have had to witness probably the sharpest challenge to collectivist habits of thought in government and society since their foundation... socialists are confronted by an uncomfortable degree of scepticism among the British population at large... Whilst Hobsbawm is concerned, as a Marxist, with the breakdown of Labour as a party of organised workers, a Fabian writer (Anthony Wright) has focused on Labour's crisis of philosophical belief, arguing that the domestic tradition of British socialism - of the Fabians, Tawney and G.D.H. Cole - faltered and lost confidence at the end of the 1960s. The left stopped 'reading Tawney', and took up continental Marxism and turned its back on the problems of Labour governments in the 1970s. By the mid-1980s, alienated from its own past, the Labour Party lacked a coherent public philosophy and had lost its idealism. Wright's answer to Labour's problems followed from this diagnosis: it was to renew the native



tradition of British socialism and above all to go back to Tawney. Stedman Jones argues that 'going back' is not the answer - historical situations change ... it is more fruitful to highlight the differences between their (Tawney's, Cole's and the Fabians') situation and our own. In doing this, we should acknowledge the exceptional stability and continuity of the British State and the British political order, including the Fabian tradition which, in 1984, could celebrate 100 years of continuity. The assumptions on which the Fabian tradition was based were slowly and silently corroded by changes in the post-war world and Britain's place within it. For Tawney all the major socialist concerns were held together within terms of the dominant contrast, that between the profit motive and the competitive scramble of individuals on the one hand and an ideal of public service as the guiding principle of society on the other. The association between socialism and professional expertise in early Fabian thought is well known. What is less often remarked, Stedman Jones continues, is how a professional conception of morality also informs Tawney's picture of socialism.

In Equality and The Acquisitive Society the attitude of the business man is contrasted with those of the doctor and the teacher, who are motivated by something higher than the making of money... Fixed within the parameters of this contrast between profit and public service, the Fabian criticism of the State remained muted and under-developed. Since the 1940s, there have been changed attitudes towards the State and the Welfare State, fuelled by Britain's relative economic decline, bureaucracy of Central and Local Government agencies and the autocracy of the nationalised industries, with emphasis on the fact - which traditional socialists have not yet begun to digest - that the most bitter strike of the 20th century (the miner's strike of 1984/85) was fought out within a nationalised industry. Stedman Jones concludes



that the whole situation and the future relevance of socialism needs to be thought out anew. In that process Tawney should be read ('if only because of the enviable clarity and simplicity with which he was able to discuss some of the problems of perennial concern to socialism'). But one thing is certain, 'Tawneyism' will not be enough.

### Towards 2000

Tawney must still be read, but we need other guides towards the future too. Raymond Williams, who offered his version of 'Tawneyism is not enough' in Culture and Society in the 1950s,<sup>137</sup> comes through again in the 1980s with an analysis and a vision which is the clearest and most authoritative guide to future developments, pertinent to the W.E.A.'s future. His objective in Towards 2000 is to understand the future, historically: "From what began in 1959 as an idea of the long revolution there is an intended and hopeful movement towards 2000".<sup>138</sup>

The book is written as a review and extension of his earlier 'prospective analysis' entitled 'Britain in the Sixties' and first published as that decade opened, in The Long Revolution. Williams reprints his analysis of 'Britain in the Sixties' as his second chapter here and resumes its discussions of economic, cultural and political structures and ideologies, and of the Labour movement; then takes his argument into new territories with chapters on 'The Culture of Nations', the world economic and political order, and the arms race; and finally moves to a reflection on the available theoretical and political 'resources for a journey of hope'. The book is obviously extraordinarily wide-ranging and ambitious. Our concern is with the issues which relate most directly to the British Labour movement, and therefore to the W.E.A..

Williams' discussion of the British Labour movement opens with a response to the current arguments concerning the supposed weakening of the relationship between the working class and socialist politics.

He accepts much of the evidence adduced in favour of such theses - the changing occupational and gender composition of the wage-earning population, the decline in the Labour Party's electoral strength, the pressure of sectionalist tendencies in the unions. He writes:

This is now the specific crisis of what is still called the Labour movement; at a first level justifiably so called, since for all the faults of parties and unions they are still the historical creation and the most organised embodiment of the working people. But under the stresses of major social and economic change and given the fact that they have at no time received the active endorsement of all working people, the rhetorical connection between their interests and a true general interest can no longer be assumed... The traditional claim that the Labour movement was more than a congeries of certain particular interest was made on two different grounds. First, within the culture of poverty, where the movement began, the claim that these particular interest amounted to a general interest had a certain absolute cast. It could not be right for so many human beings to live like that. (However)... the very success of the Labour movement itself, in the old industrial countries, has at least qualified that kind of claim... The second argument for the Labour movement as an inherent general interest was different. It was said that the capitalist system, by expropriating the common means of production, and by the private appropriation of the surplus value of labour, is inherently hostile to the general interest and thus incompatible with it. This is indeed my own belief. I am one of the small minority, within capitalist societies, who continue to see this as a relatively obvious fact., The familiar next stage of the argument is that the organised Labour movement is the only force that can end capitalism. Thus, any action against it, however local and particularist in form,



connects with this underlying general interest. (But this may no longer be assumed): it may, for example, simply force the transfer of capital elsewhere, often to the capitalist advantage. Even more, it cannot be assumed that an action against a particular 'public corporation'... is an action against the capitalist system. It is often, in practice, seen as an action against the 'general public' and taken as evidence of the failure of socialism!<sup>139</sup>

Nevertheless, he is sceptical of the conclusions some have drawn from this Labour movement crisis. He points out that there is no single politically decisive demarcation of the 'working class': all the available sociological indices suggest that the class-politics relation has never known the unison now supposedly lost; the general voting pattern in Britain remains substantially class-differential; and he agrees with Hobsbawm that proletarianisation has continued if the criterion of 'all wage earners' is taken as a basis for definition. He concludes, however:

The real struggle has broadened so much, the decisive issues have been so radically changed that only a new kind of socialist movement, fully contemporary in its ideals and methods, bringing a wide range of needs and interests together in a new definition of the general interest, has any real future.<sup>140</sup>

This new movement will find some of its strongest practical supports in the 'new movements' of recent decades and in actually existing or potential 'effective communities'. The 'new movements', for Williams, are - the ecology movement, the women's movement, the peace movement, solidarity with the third world, alternative energy and technology developments, campaigns against poverty and homelessness, campaigns against cultural poverty and distortions, alternative culture (new work in theatre, film, community writing and publishing).

In his final chapter, 'Resources for a Journey of Hope', he fore-



sees the future decades in Britain (and Western Europe) as a conflict between a new hard-line capitalist strategy (which he calls 'Plan X' and which incorporates the new monetarism and 'Thatcherism') and those forces, incorporating the Labour movement and the 'new movements', working for a changed economic order which must now shift production trends to new governing standards of durability, quality and economy in the use of non-renewable resources.

It is significant (and no accident, as Marxists used to say) that at the same time as Williams was writing Towards 2000, a writer in another country, Fritjof Capra, was completing his equally ambitious book The Turning Point: Science, Society and the Rising Culture.<sup>141</sup> Capra's earlier book, The Tao of Physics,<sup>142</sup> had been an international best-seller and as a physicist, exploring the relationship between the natural sciences, and Eastern religion and philosophy it is obvious that his background and approach is radically different.

Yet, the substance of his social and political perspective as advanced in The Turning Point is similar to that now advanced by Raymond Williams. The title of Capra's book refers to what he calls a 'paradigm shift':

We live today in a globally interconnected world, in which biological, psychological, social and environmental phenomena are all inter-dependent. To describe the world appropriately we need an ecological perspective which the Cartesian world view does not offer. What we need then is a new 'paradigm' - a new vision of reality; a fundamental change in our thoughts, perceptions and values. The beginnings of this change, of the shift from the mechanistic to the holistic conception of reality, are already visible in all fields... The sixties and seventies have generated a whole series of social movements that all seem to go in the same direction emphasising

different aspects of the new vision of reality... This new vision includes the emerging systems view of life, mind, consciousness and evolution; the corresponding holistic approach to health and healing; the integration of Western and Eastern approaches to psychology and psychotherapy; a new conceptual framework for economics and technology; and an ecological and feminist perspective which is spiritual in its ultimate nature and will lead to profound changes in our social and political structures.<sup>143</sup>

The detail of Capra's analysis of the new social movements and their significance for the 'rising culture' which he desires and advocates bears close similarity to Williams' materialist analysis and proposals.

### Towards 2003

The significance of these perspectives for the future of workers' education in particular and adult education in general we will now consider. Trying to look ahead and predict future trends, even for little more than a decade - as Williams and Capra have done - is fraught with difficulty. Even so, it is natural, useful and probably more necessary than ever to try to plan for the future. Some in the W.E.A. are already using the phrase, 'Towards 2003'. Asa Briggs even began to look ahead to that W.E.A. 100th Anniversary when he addressed the Harrogate conference of the W.E.A. on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary:

"Can we catch a glimpse", I asked, "of our future in 2003?"

I pointed to three dangers - that of pitching the W.E.A.'s golden age in the past; that of turning a lively voluntary organisation into a vested interest; and that of worshipping tradition and fighting shy of experiment.<sup>144</sup>

The West Lancs. and Cheshire District has launched its Appeal Fund, 'Towards 2003' in 1987, "to ensure a healthy and vigorous W.E.A. at



its centenary".<sup>145</sup>

Trying to understand the W.E.A.'s future, historically, from the basis of this inquiry, what conclusions may be drawn, and are there reasons for believing that the W.E.A. has a future which will be as challenging and as creative as its past?

#### The tensions will remain

It is quite clear that the central tensions I have been examining will not go away. They remain, as we have seen, not just in the W.E.A. but also in the adult residential colleges, in the Open University, in the broadcasting media and in all areas involving education. If the W.E.A. continues to function then one can predict with certainty that tensions analagous, at least, to those described and analysed above will recur. Indeed, it seems likely that in areas of work involving, directly or indirectly, sexism, racism, ecological, environmental and animal rights issues there will be an intensification of these tensions.

#### The implications for the tutor and the student

In the actual teaching and learning situations, there need be no great problem for the W.E.A. which has, after all, survived with these tensions for over eighty years. There is, however, a case for a revised and up-dated set of guidelines for good W.E.A. practice when dealing with controversy, especially as the W.E.A. has developed an impressive programme of in-service training in the 1980s for professional staff and voluntary members.

It is clear, for example, that we should now beware of labelling subjects or issues, 'controversial', or 'value-free' or 'non-political'. In a particular time and place, one subject or issue may be more



controversial than another but (as we have seen in relation to Literature as a W.E.A. subject) these judgements about what is provocative, ideological, political, or controversial can change quite dramatically.

Likewise, the earlier appeals for the tutor to practice objectivity and an avoidance of bias in teaching should be shifted to an emphasis upon honesty and integrity of approach, which would include all the traditional demands - respect for evidence, rational analysis, tolerance towards opposing or alternative viewpoints. But this change of emphasis should signal that more attention be given to the issue of bias and objectivity, not less. Sir Keith Joseph made a wise and helpful statement in 1983: "... the most effective antidote to indoctrination is more political education".<sup>146</sup> To the truth of that statement could be added a supplementary, "The most effective antidote to bias is more education about propaganda and objectivity". All W.E.A. tutors could be encouraged (and helped through in-service training) to promote informed discussion on these important issues.

#### The implications for the W.E.A. as an organisation

Moving out from the class-room or discussion group, trying to place the issues of this inquiry into a context to define the central tensions facing, or likely to face, the W.E.A. in general (given the Association's dual commitment to 'social purpose' and 'academic neutrality') we confront a much more difficult enterprise.

We can see this in the way the word 'neutrality' has a different meaning when applied to an institution or to a whole movement. We have accepted that bias exists on a small scale in W.E.A. classes all the time (as in all kinds of education) and that the most effective antidote to indoctrination is good educational practice - namely, fostering critical awareness. The most committed tutors and students should recognise that stripping themselves of prejudice enables the more

effective movement towards the truth. In that sense, academic neutrality is a positive goal for everybody. When, however, we consider the W.E.A. itself in relation to other institutions, movements and society at large, the same cannot apply.

Neutrality may still be sought, but rather in the sense that a balance be achieved, a consensus sought, a non-party political and an unsectarian position held. The definition of neutrality here may simply be complicit with the majority view in society at a particular time. We noted that the 'Annan Committee' on broadcasting advised the broadcasting authorities:

... to take account not just of the whole range of views but also the weight of opinion which holds these views, whilst recognising that the weight of opinion and the range of views is constantly changing.<sup>147</sup>

The W.E.A. is expected to conform - for similar reasons - to that kind of broadly neutral position, otherwise its public funding could be threatened, if not ended. Even so, the 'ideological parameters' within which the W.E.A. operates are not as restrictive as this may immediately imply. Richard Crossman's view, expressed in late 1945, is pertinent:

The W.E.A. is concerned with education; not with political parties. It had a profound influence on this election, precisely because it had not for the last twenty years been consciously working for it, because it had been doing not propaganda but adult education, because it did not attach itself either to the state or to any political party. Education is a far more revolutionary force in the long run than political organisation: it creates the mental atmosphere in which political change is possible.<sup>148</sup>

#### The W.E.A. as a movement

Bearing in mind Crossman's view of the W.E.A.'s influence on the 1945 Labour Party victory in the general election and returning to our



theme of crisis in the Labour movement we should note again the paradox about the W.E.A. and the adult education movement. In the 1980s, despite all the cuts in grant-aid, the pressures on adult education, the overt and subversive attacks on liberal adult education - the fact remains that the W.E.A. has more students, branches and professional staff than in its 'heroic period' in the first half of the century. Adult and continuing education as a whole offers a huge number of courses (relatively speaking) in the adult education market place. The 'Educational Woolworths' is well established and it is open all hours, but with the danger that Tawney (coiner of the phrase) foresaw before the days of the supermarket. That is, much going on, many courses and students but with the adult education movement weaker and more fragmented than in the first half of the century. Indeed, it may be argued that there is no longer a movement; rather, at best, different 'interest groups' pursuing their adult education whether in University, OU, Poly, L.E.A. or other courses or within the W.E.A., but with the primary commitment given to the 'interest' and - if you're lucky - the group.

The reason for this weakening of the W.E.A. as a movement is directly related to the crisis in the Labour movement: the economic and sociological landscape which sustained the organised working class as the agent of social change and nourished the early W.E.A.'s sense of purpose and cohesion has changed dramatically, in the way Hobsbawm and others have described.

The major task confronting the W.E.A. is that of generating the cohesion and unity necessary for a whole movement to regain and hold its momentum. The key question, following on, is whether the W.E.A. can do this given the decline in the strength and importance of the Labour movement and when so many external pressures are weakening, if not destroying, the liberal adult education tradition. The prospect of an increasingly marginalised W.E.A. has to be faced, with the tension



between the different 'interests' and factions getting more fraught and problematical as diminishing resources force a self-destructive inner conflict. The history and demise of the Mechanics Institutes, the University Extension Movement, and the N.C.L.C. shows what can happen when a movement loses momentum and ossifies in detachment from the emergent trends and the new social forces in society.

That is a danger facing the W.E.A. in the late 1980s. But the crisis may also create opportunities and there are grounds for believing that the W.E.A. has its own 'resources for a journey of hope' towards 2003.

#### The W.E.A. and the 'Information Explosion'

In the babel of voices that assault us on every side, it is harder than ever to distinguish fact from fantasy, reason from the irrational, reality from the constructs and inventions of those who have a vested interest in ensuring that certain information reaches us (e.g. the exigencies of advertising) even if this means the exclusion of other equally or more important knowledge or wisdom.

J. Seabrook, Workers Education 1987<sup>149</sup>

The need for adult education and workers education is as great as ever. The number of adults capable of benefitting from W.E.A. courses certainly does not get smaller. The numbers and the needs are both, it can be strongly argued, increasing if only because of the paradox of the 'information explosion' caused by the electronic media. Needs are not the same as demands and the problem for the W.E.A., in this sphere, will be trying to marry the real needs with a hunger for knowledge which is inchoate, harder to satisfy, and more difficult to reach, given the 'information explosion'. The dominant effect of this is to promote disinformation and distortion, when advertising slogans and media simplifications and distractions are pervasive and saturating.

That this marriage can be effected to the benefit of genuine educational growth with large numbers of adults is demonstrated by the success of the Open University. Distance learning, using the technological and electronic advances to create an 'effective learning community' has proved its efficacy.

There are real signs, in the 1980s, that the W.E.A. is adapting to this change, developing its own methods and approaches by using its strength as a national organisation - but without, one hopes, losing its strong federal and local democratic traditions. Nationally it can learn from, and integrate, the best of the new educational developments and processes, using the professional expertise of those involved in information and communications technology.

Thus, since the 1970s, the major spheres of W.E.A. work, Trade Union Studies and Womens Education have developed an impressive range of publications (leaflets, promotional material, booklets, magazines and books) with an uncharacteristic professionalism in terms of presentation, style and promotion.

In 1984, the W.E.A. launched a high-profile campaign to make its case politically using a kind of professional campaigning approach new to the Association. The strategy and programmes of in-service training for tutors, professional staff and voluntary members have been developed in the 1980s on a scale not previously attempted.

The Publications Working Group Report, Towards a National Publications Policy (March, 1985) received the support of the biennial Conference of the Association and so the W.E.A. now has a policy for development which includes the new journal, Workers Education, a W.E.A. Video and other publication and publicity initiatives. The new journal aims to revive in the late 1980s and the 1990s the best traditions of The Highway and Plebs. In all this, and especially in the development of a national W.E.A. dimension and identity, exploiting the professional



skills within and outside the W.E.A., there is a centralising tendency which may, however, intensify tensions as the old principles of voluntaryism, autonomous Districts and local democracy are defended or re-asserted.

#### The W.E.A. and the new social movements

It is significant that the W.E.A. has been able to continue to co-operate with and learn from partners in the adult education sector but any real hope for a confident future must rest upon the W.E.A.'s connections with the wider forces and movements in society.

The W.E.A. and its branches need roots. Looking ahead to 2003, where are these roots going to find nurture to enable continued growth? The question takes us back to fundamentals, and the vision of the Association's founder. Just as Mansbridge's metaphor of the highway was a powerful one, symbolising a rejection of the old ideas of 'the ladder of education' and emphasising a movement towards a goal of egalitarianism, so President Nyere of Tanzania described education, in another striking image, as a "... big hill which climbs to the skies and gives a view over the surrounding countryside".<sup>150</sup> The implication being that education can help us to understand better what is happening all around us (and also, like Donne's 'hill of truth', it may be a hard slog to attain that understanding) but in addition the metaphor of the hill is a reminder that as understanding increases so horizons shift and goals expand.

What can I see now from my position up the hill? The quotation from Africa signals that we need, crucially, to learn from the experiences of other societies as we grow increasingly inter-dependent in our 'global village'. A commitment to workers' education should carry - now more than ever - an international dimension: the rich North seeking to engage with and learn from the poor South.



It the title, Workers Educational Association has had any symbolic resonance, then it has signalled a special commitment to the poor and the oppressed. In our own time, and looking ahead to 2003, this commitment must include as a priority those not, in fact, in work: the unemployed, the old, the handicapped and the vulnerable, the young, as well as that substantial number of educationally disadvantaged adults generally.

At the same time, the W.E.A. must strive to remain in the vanguard of workers education in the traditional sense: that is, providing adult education for those men and women employed particularly in low-paid sectors of the economy - be it a manufacturing, agricultural, service or self-service economy. To do this most effectively the Association will need to maintain its close working relationship with the trade unions whilst also adopting flexible and, maybe, experimental methods to try to meet the needs of unorganised workers who are in 'casual', part-time or erratic employment.

It is an interesting phenomenon, that as the nature of work is changing rapidly, the education system is being subjected in many countries, including Britain, to pressures to relate school more closely to working life. But we are also told now, from all sides, that the country needs a 'flexible work force'. These pressures bring to centre-stage the old dichotomy between vocational and non-vocational education. There is sound reason, and some evidence, for concluding that the most vocational education will be what has been called non-vocational education. In other words, a good general education is helpful in gaining access to a variety of jobs, whereas a very specialised education only fits a person to one type of job.

Thus, the argument for liberal adult education can be re-stated as part of a strategy in which the W.E.A. could make a contribution to employment-related education and training, building from the 'Second Chance to Learn' initiatives which the W.E.A. helped pioneer, from

the late 1970s.

Finally, and perhaps most crucially, in seeking a role appropriate to the twenty-first century the W.E.A. will need to develop and strengthen its relationship with the new social movements: forging strategic alliances wherever possible with the women's movement, the ecology movement, the peace movements, those from and working in solidarity with the third world. It is already quite clear from the substantial development of women's education in the W.E.A. since the mid-1970s that these relationships and alliances do not just bring a new dynamism to workers' education and adult education but they bring fresh challenges, ideas and approaches to W.E.A. learning and organisational structures.

Any real movement forward, taking our generation and the next through this critical 'turning point' better to cope with the problems facing our societies in the twenty-first century must - we can conclude - thrive on the tension between passionate commitment and critical inquiry because, however small-scale and specific the W.E.A. history has been, what we may learn generally from over eight decades' rich and varied experience is that the inevitable tensions can be made positive and creative.

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2. The 'Headlam-Hobhouse' Report clearly helped Mansbridge in his campaign for a partnership, through the Tutorial Class Movement, between Labour and Learning. See Mansbridge, University Tutorial Classes, *ibid.* p. 128.
3. S.G. Raybould, University Standards in W.E.A. Work. A W.E.A. booklet, (London, 1948). T. Kelly quotes from the Report in his book, Outside the Walls (Manchester, 1950) and observes; "... their considered judgement on the question of standards is so valuable, even today." p. 61.  
  
The 'Headlam-Hobhouse' Report was a key text in the Cambridge University Extra-Mural Board/W.E.A. Eastern District Tutor-Training Course (which ran concurrently with the annual Summer School) when I attended it in 1965. The Report's use, and its value for contemporary guidance was so strongly challenged by tutors-in-training in the late 1960s that it ceased to play the same part in the course after 1970.
4. The 'Headlam-Hobhouse' Report, *op. cit.* p. 145.
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6. Board of Education Regulations for Further Education in England and Wales from 1st August, 1908 to 31st July, 1909. Quoted in A. Mansbridge, University Tutorial Classes, *op. cit.* p. 137.



7. See S.G. Raybould, Ed., Trends in Adult Education (London, 1959), Chapter III, 'Controversies' by Roy Shaw, pp. 192-207.
8. Ibid. p. 197 from a speech, "received with acclaim" (Shaw), at a tutors' conference in 1952, and later printed in Adult Education, Autumn 1952, under the title, The Future of Adult Education, p. 87. Peers also makes the point that, "... the conception of a 'standard' for which the normal measure is examination performance is meaningless in relation to the tasks of adult education". p.93.
9. See The 'Headlam-Hobhouse' Report, op. cit. p. 161, where they write, "Care must also be taken to get the best men for the work. One or two weak or tactless lecturers might give a serious set-back to the movement".
10. Quoted by Shaw in Raybould, op. cit. p. 195, from Adult Education, Spring, 1953.
11. Ibid. p. 197. Shaw has paraphrased and quoted Bruce from his article, The Universities and Adult Education, The Highway, November, 1952, p. 57.
12. R.H. Tawney, Addresses to W.E.A. Conferences (a bound collection of these Addresses). Temple House, W.E.A. London, 1953. p. 13. of the 1934 Address.
13. S. G. Raybould, Trends in Adult Education, op. cit. p. 4.
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16. S.G. Raybould, Trends... op. cit. pp. 194-195.
17. In Adult Education, Winter, 1952; and in The English Universities and Adult Education, (W.E.A. London, 1951), Chapter 1..
18. Elitism is a difficult word, obviously, but it can be argued that the effect of the 'University Standards' goal was to encourage, in changed social and educational circumstances, an educated middle-class participation and emphasis. Tawney was also anxious, from the beginning, that the Tutorial Classes should not

- become a ladder to the universities: "There was a danger, in Tawney's view, that the Tutorial Classes would produce a new educational elite if they became principally a route to the universities." J.R. Brooks, R.H. Tawney and the Reform of English Education, Ph.D. Thesis (The University of Wales, 1974), p. 73.
19. A. Mansbridge, University Tutorial Classes, op. cit. p.41.
  20. R.H. Tawney, 'An Experiment in Democratic Education' in The Radical Tradition, (London, 1964), op. cit. p. 85.
  21. Quoted by Sir Richard Livingstone, The Future in Education (Cambridge, 1941), p. 71, from Politics viii, 2.6..
  22. P.H. Hirst, Knowledge and the Curriculum, (London, 1974), p. 31.
  23. Ibid. p. 33.
  24. J.H. Newman, On University Education (London, 1915), pp. 92-93.
  25. Hirst has written, "The various forms of knowledge can be seen in low level developments within the common area of our knowledge of the everyday world. From this there branch out the developed forms which, taking certain elements in our common knowledge as a basis, have grown in distinctive ways." op. cit. p.44.
  26. R.H. Tawney, 'The W.E.A. and Adult Education', A Lecture on the occasion of the W.E.A.'s 50th Anniversary, printed in The Radical Tradition, op. cit., pp. 87-88.
  27. H. Wiltshire, 'The Great Tradition in University Adult Education' in A. Rogers, Ed., The Spirit and the Form - Essays in Adult Education in honour of Professor Harold Wiltshire (Nottingham, 1976), pp. 31-32.
  28. John Milton, Of Education (1644). The Complete Prose Works of John Milton Vol. II. (Yale, 1959), pp. 371-379.

29. W.E.A. Constitution and Statement of Policy - in the 'old' and revised (1929) versions. P.6 of the revised version.
30. The '1919 Report', op. cit. Final Report p. 5.
31. Perhaps the most famous and widely quoted statement on Adult Education is that made by Churchill when he was Prime Minister in 1953 in response to a T.U.C. protest about economies proposed by the Minister of Education: "I have no doubt that a man or woman earnestly seeking in grown-up life to be guided to wide and suggestive knowledge in its largest and most uplifted sphere will make the best of all pupils in this age of clatter and buzz, of gape and gloat. The appetite of adults to be shown the foundations and processes of thought will never be denied by a British Administration cherishing the continuity of our island life". R.A. Butler, in the White Paper which outlined the underlying principles of the legislation for the 1944 Education Act, wrote; "It is thus within the wider sphere of adult education that an ultimate training in democratic citizenship must be sought". See. W.O. Lester Smith, Education (Pelican, 1961), pp. 19-20.
32. H. Wiltshire, in A. Rogers, Ed., The Spirit and the Form, op. cit. - the article was first published in Adult Education, Autumn 1956.
33. Ibid. (Rogers) p.32.
34. E. Green, Adult Education - Why this Apathy? (London, 1953).
35. H. Wiltshire, in A. Rogers, Ed., The Spirit and the Form, op. cit. pp. 115-117.
36. Ibid. p. 115.
37. Ibid. p. 116.
38. Though even here there may be some 'hidden' social and political education through, for example, the re-inforcement of, or challenges to, stereo-typing of sexual roles: an all women's course on 'Car Maintenance'?



39. H. Wiltshire, in A. Rogers, Ed., The Spirit and the Form, op. cit. p. 117.
40. The 'Headlam-Hobhouse' Report, op. cit. p. 147.
41. P.H. Hirst, op. cit. p.43.
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